NEW

EXCLUSIVE QUALITY — Bringing History to Life — COLLECTOR'S EDITION

THE RISE AND FALL *of the* THIRD REICH





Brainwashed: Simple messages united the masses



Ready for battle: 3 million Nazis blindly followed orders



The Iron Cross: Hitler proudly wore his World War I medal



Froze to death: Blitzkrieg halted on Russian steppes

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MINUTE-BY-MINUTE COVERAGE – AS HISTORY HAPPENED

The Third Reich's rise and fall

When Adolf Hitler seized power in 1933, he promised the German people a 1,000-year empire. Germany was poor and disillusioned after World War I, but the dictator rapidly transformed the country. The unemployed found work building motorways, the young were indoctrinated in the Hitler Youth and industry received a massive boost as war production took off. Fuelled by hubris, Hitler went to war. At first, the German war machine roared forward, but after subjugating most of western Europe, Hitler erred in opening a second front against his eastern neighbour and one-time ally, the Soviet Union. Defeat outside Moscow marked the turning point and soon German troops were in retreat. As the Allies approached Berlin from east and west, the Führer cowered in his bunker where a ceaseless barrage of Soviet bombs day and night told him the war was lost. He rejected all advice to flee and chose instead to commit suicide with long-time mistress Eva Braun. Read here the account of Hitler's 12 years in power that marked the rise and fall of the Third Reich.

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1933-1939

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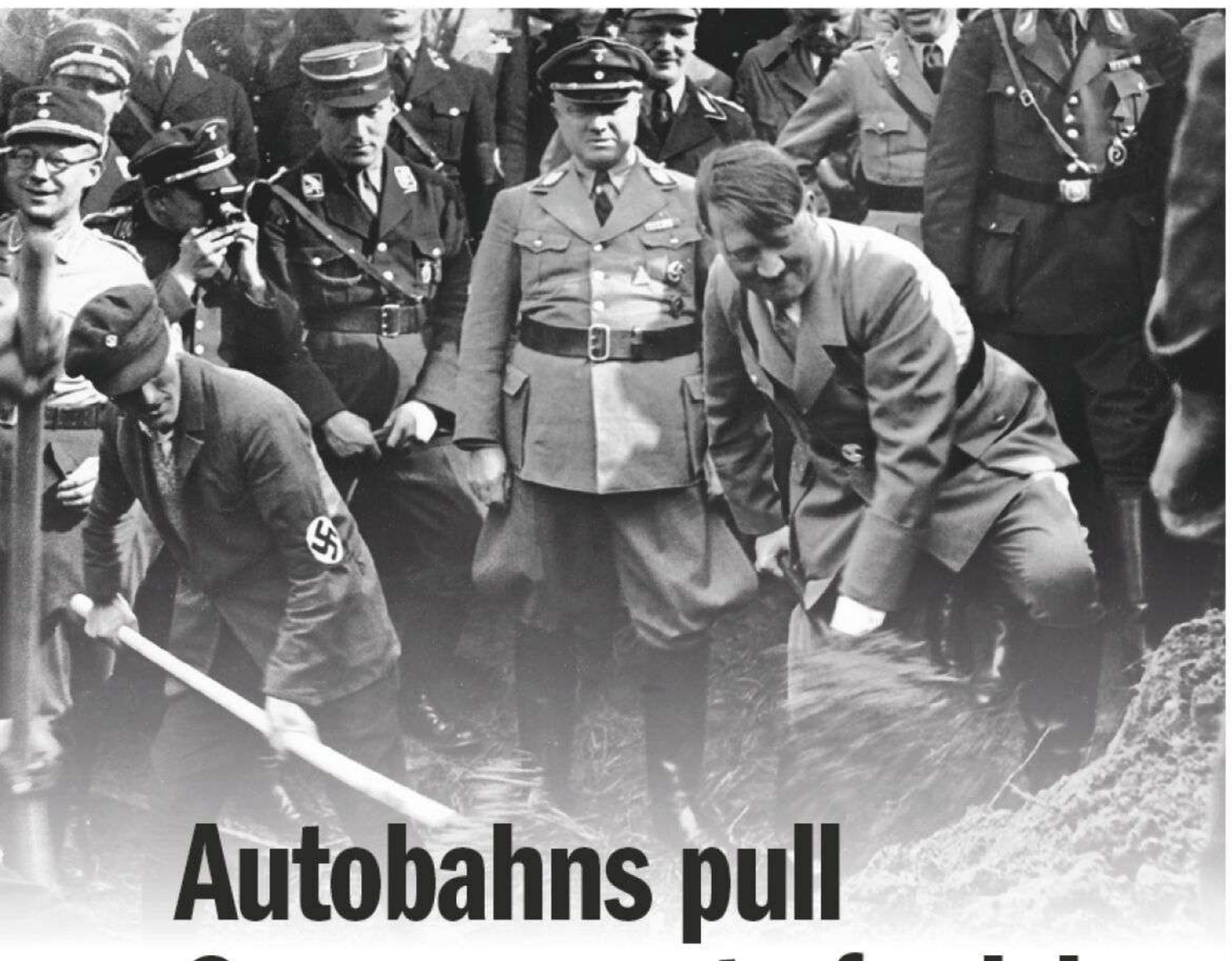
168 GERMANY IS FORCED TO PEACE
New Nazi leaders fight for an acceptable deal.

30TH JANUARY, 1933: German president Paul von Hindenburg appoints Nazi leader Adolf Hitler as German Chancellor.

5TH MARCH: Hitler's party, the National Socialists, secures 43.9 percent of the vote in elections to the German Reichstag.

23RD MARCH: the Reichstag passes the Enabling Act, making Hitler dictator.

12TH AUGUST: British Conservative politician Winston Churchill warns about the dangers of Germany's rearmament in a speech.



Autobahns pull Germany out of crisis

23RD SEPTEMBER The construction of highways and tanks leads Germany out of the economic crisis. Unemployment keeps dropping, and the Nazis are hailed as the country's rescuers. But the figures are manipulated, and success is hollow.

Read about Hitler's "miracle" on page 50

12TH NOVEMBER: at the first general election in the new one-party state, National Socialists secure 92 percent of the vote.

20TH DECEMBER: the German government says that 400,000 citizens are to be sterilised due to "hereditary defects".

20TH JANUARY, 1934: Germany and Poland sign a ten-year non-aggression pact.

6TH FEBRUARY: far-right leagues gather in front of the National Assembly in Paris in an unsuccessful coup against the French Third Republic.

9TH FEBRUARY: Gaston Doumergue forms a new coalition government in France.

8TH MARCH: a photograph taken by astronomer Edwin Hubble shows as many galaxies as the Milky Way has stars.

21ST APRIL: Robert Wilson of London takes a photo of the Loch Ness monster. The picture is revealed as fake in 1994.

7TH MAY: a Filipino diver discovers the world's largest pearl. It measures 24 centimetres in diameter and weighs 6.4 kilograms.

28TH MAY: Canadians Oliva and Elzire Dionne become parents to the first quintuplets to survive infancy. All are girls.

Donald Duck makes cinematic debut

9TH JUNE: Donald Duck appears for the first time in the Disney cartoon "The Wise Little Hen", but only in a supporting role. Donald is the Hen's selfish neighbour.



24TH JANUARY, 1935: the world's first canned beer sold in the US by the Gottfried Krueger Brewing Company.

26TH FEBRUARY: Hitler orders the buildup of the German Luftwaffe, in direct violation of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles.

15TH MAY: Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin opens the newly built metro in Moscow to the Russian public.



Hitler Youth trains for war

14TH SEPTEMBER Millions of German boys between 10 and 18 years are forced into the Nazi youth corps where they're brainwashed and trained for battle.

Read about the Hitler Youth on page 66

15TH SEPTEMBER: Nuremberg Laws come into force, depriving native Jewish people of their German nationality.

30TH SEPTEMBER: President Franklin D Roosevelt inaugurates the Hoover Dam a full five months before its actually completed.

12TH DECEMBER: SS leader Heinrich Himmler sets up Lebensborn, a programme designed to increase birth rates of "Aryan" children.

1933-35

6TH FEBRUARY 1936: the fourth Winter Olympic Games opens in Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Germany.

17TH FEBRUARY: the Phantom, the first superhero to wear a tight-fitting costume and mask, debuts in comic form in the US.

7TH MARCH: Nazi Germany remilitarises the Rhineland in direct violation of several international treaties.

19TH APRIL: an Arab revolt in Palestine erupts against both the British government and Jewish immigration.

17TH MAY: Italy annexes Ethiopia and combines it with Eritrea and Somaliland to form the Italian East Africa colony.

28TH MAY: English mathematician Alan Turing submits a science article, "On Computable Numbers..." to the London Mathematical Society. The article describes the principles of a precursor to the modern computer.

17TH JULY: the Spanish Army of Africa launches a coup against the Second Spanish Republic, which will lead to the Spanish Civil War.

Art reflected Nazi ideals

1936 Symbolic sculptures, bombastic buildings and strong athletes express Nazi ideals of totalitarian power and an Aryan people with superior strength.



25TH NOVEMBER: Japan and Germany form the Anti-Comintern Pact to counter communism and the Soviet Union.

30TH NOVEMBER: London's Crystal Palace, built for the 1851 World Exhibition, is destroyed in a fire.

Olympics exploited for propaganda

1ST AUGUST Hitler doesn't like sport, but the Führer sees an opportunity to present a glamorous image of Nazi Germany through the Olympics. The propaganda games are a success, with enthusiastic foreign reports.

Read about the Berlin Olympics on page 94



14TH AUGUST: Rainey Bethea is hanged in Owensboro, Kentucky, convicted of raping and murdering a 70-year-old woman. The hanging is the last public execution in the US.

5TH SEPTEMBER: photographer Robert Capa takes his famous image of a partisan being shot during the Spanish Civil War (The Falling Soldier). The photo's authenticity is later disputed.

7TH SEPTEMBER: the last Tasmanian wolf (thylacine) dies at Hobart Zoo in Tasmania.

28TH SEPTEMBER: Sweden's "Holiday Government", formed in the spring, steps down after elections. Prime Minister Axel Pehrsson-Bramstorp is replaced by former PM Per Albin Hansson.

3RD NOVEMBER: Franklin D Roosevelt is re-elected as US president after a landslide.

Hitler draws dream city

1936 Hitler believes the German capital is pitiful, and draws up new plans for a renamed Berlin called Germania. The city's central axis must be a victory avenue from a giant triumphal arch to the Great Hall.

Read about Germania on page 56



5TH DECEMBER: the Transcaucasian Soviet Republic is split into separate republics: Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia.

10TH DECEMBER: Edward VIII abdicates. His younger brother Prince Albert succeeds him as George VI.

1936

26TH APRIL 1937: the Luftwaffe bombs the Basque town of Guernica. The bombing inspires a painting named after the town by Pablo Picasso.

28TH MAY: Conservative Neville Chamberlain becomes British Prime Minister.

Amelia Earhart vanishes without trace

2ND JULY: Amelia Earhart and navigator Fred Noonan disappear during Earhart's attempt to become the first female circumnavigator.



7TH JULY: Japanese forces invade China.

31ST JULY: the Soviet Union executes 75,950 "former kulaks, active anti-Soviet elements, and criminals", deporting an additional 193,000 to camps.

5TH NOVEMBER: 5,000 Republican supporters are massacred in the town of Piedrafita de Babia, Spain.

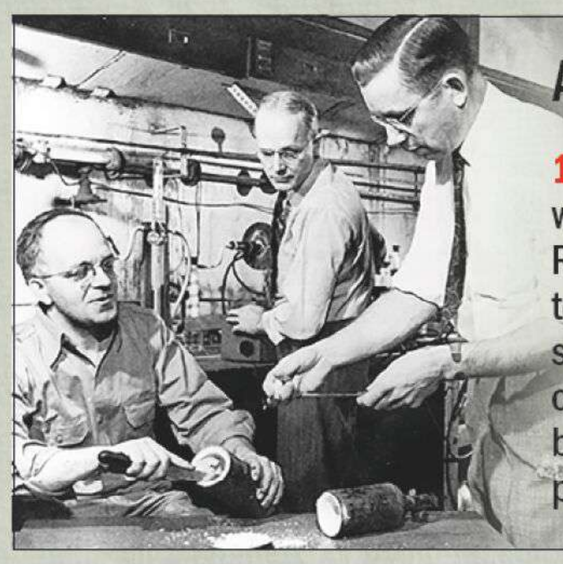
5TH NOVEMBER: Hitler lays out his plans for Lebensraum in Eastern Europe during a secret meeting in the Reich Chancellery.

13TH DECEMBER: the Battle of Nanjing ends with Japanese occupation of the Chinese city. Over 300,000 Chinese die during the occupation.

29TH DECEMBER: the Irish Free State becomes the Republic of Ireland after a referendum to adopt a new Irish constitution.

4TH FEBRUARY 1938: Hitler dismantles the Reich War Ministry, replacing it with the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, giving him direct control over the military.

12TH MARCH: Germans occupy Austria in the so-called Anschluß.



Accidental invention

1938: during an experiment with a new coolant, chemist Roy Plunkett sees that tetrafluoroethylene, a gas, solidifies as a smooth coating on the inside of a pressure bottle. The material is then patented as Teflon.



Hitler is the new Messiah

30TH SEPTEMBER Adolf Hitler is not only head of state, but also viewed as a demigod in German people's eyes. This extreme devotion to the Führer isn't spontaneous, but the result of many years of propaganda by Joseph Goebbels, which portrays Hitler as the saviour of Germany.

1ST OCTOBER: German troops enter German-speaking areas of Czechoslovakia, Sudetenland, which Hitler annexes.

30TH OCTOBER: Orson Welles' radio dramatisation of the novel *The War of the Worlds* spreads a wave of panic across US cities.

9TH NOVEMBER: Nazi activists loot Jewish shops and synagogues in Germany. The incident is called Kristallnacht (Crystal Night).

1937-38

27TH FEBRUARY 1939: France and Britain recognise Franco's government in Spain.

15TH MARCH: Czechoslovakia ceases to exist as a nation state when German troops occupy the remaining parts of Bohemia and Moravia.

17TH MAY: Sweden, Norway and Finland reject German offers of non-aggression pacts.

1ST SEPTEMBER: German troops invade Poland – World War II breaks out. Switzerland, Norway, Sweden and Finland declare themselves neutral.

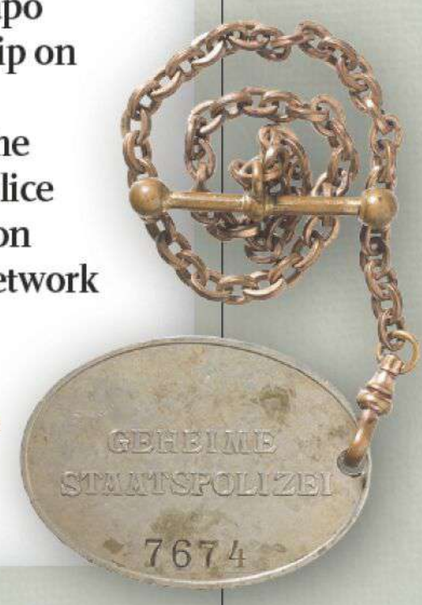
4TH JANUARY 1940: the head of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Göring, takes control of the German war industry.

10TH JANUARY: a German plane containing Hitler's secret plans to invade Western Europe crash-lands in Belgium. The incident leads to the Netherlands mobilising its defences.

The Gestapo is unleashed

1941 During the war, the Gestapo tightens its grip on Germany's population. The Nazi secret police relies heavily on help from a network of informers and agents.

Read about the secret police on page 86



Nazis kidnap children in their thousands

7TH OCTOBER Children with the right genes are in high demand in Germany as the Nazis resort to kidnapping and birth programmes to obtain new fair-haired and blue-eyed inhabitants for the Third Reich.



3RD MARCH: a timed bomb kills five at the offices of Swedish communist newspaper *Norrskensflammans*.

9TH APRIL: Germany invades Denmark and Norway.

10TH MAY: Winston Churchill takes over as British Prime Minister after Neville Chamberlain's resignation.

14TH MAY: the Dutch army surrenders after heavy bombing of Rotterdam.

26TH MAY: the evacuation of 300,000 Allied troops at Dunkirk begins.

14TH JUNE: German forces occupy Paris.

10TH JULY: beginning of the Battle of Britain.

3RD-6TH AUGUST: Soviet annexation of the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

7TH SEPTEMBER: the Blitz starts with nightly bombings of London by the Luftwaffe.

15TH OCTOBER: Charlie Chaplin's satirical war movie "The Dictator" premieres.

16TH OCTOBER: US starts registering around 16 million conscripted men.

28TH OCTOBER: Italian troops invade Greece.

12TH FEBRUARY: policeman Albert Alexander is the first to be treated intravenously with antibiotics for an infection at the Radcliffe Infirmary in Oxford. He eventually dies, but only because of a shortage of penicillin.

Peugeot launches small electric car

1ST MAY: in response to the occupying power's fuel restrictions, French carmaker Peugeot launches the VLV electric microcar.



22ND JUNE: Nazi Germany invades the Soviet Union.

12TH NOVEMBER: Battle of Moscow begins.

7TH DECEMBER: bombers from Japanese aircraft carriers launch a surprise attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor.

8TH DECEMBER: President Roosevelt officially declares war on Japan.

14TH OCTOBER: *HMS Royal Oak* is sunk by a German U-boat in the naval base at Scapa Flow.

30TH NOVEMBER: Soviet forces cross the border into neutral Finland and bomb Helsinki in the first throes of the Winter War.

15TH DECEMBER: the romantic movie "Gone with the Wind" starring Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable makes its premiere in the United States.

28TH DECEMBER: Britain introduces rationing of bacon, butter and sugar.

2ND JANUARY: Japanese troops occupy the Philippine capital, Manila.

13TH JANUARY: a German test pilot uses an ejector seat for the first time on a Heinkel He 280 jet fighter plane.

20TH JANUARY: the Berlin government and senior SS officers implement the "Final Solution" on the Jewish question: the relocation and extermination of all Jews in Europe.

1ST FEBRUARY: Vidkun Quisling becomes Norway's Prime Minister.

15TH FEBRUARY: Allied forces in the British crown colony Singapore surrender to the Japanese. About 130,000 Indian, Australian and British soldiers are taken prisoner.

30TH MAY: the RAF conducts the first bombing raid using over a thousand planes, destroying large parts of Cologne.

21ST JUNE: the German Afrika Korps led by General Erwin Rommel occupy the port city of Tobruk in north-eastern Libya. Around 32,000 Allied soldiers are taken prisoner.

Jews survive in hiding

22ND JUNE While the Nazis systematically kill millions of Jews in concentration camps, a few survive in the Third Reich through perpetual flight.





Nazism governs family life

1942 Women are sent home to bear children, the children are taught to worship their Führer, and the men train for battle. Nazi ideology bores deep into private lives and sustains gender stereotypes in Germany.

Read about the family on page 64

18TH JULY: German test pilot Fritz Wendel flies a jet-powered version of the Messerschmitt Me 262 fighter plane.

20TH AUGUST: a measurable amount of the element plutonium is isolated for the first time in the US at the University of Chicago.

21ST AUGUST: German Alpine hunters plant a Nazi flag on top of Europe's highest peak, the 5,642-metre-high Mount Elbrus in the Caucasus.

23RD SEPTEMBER: the US puts the Manhattan Project into action under the direction of Major General Leslie R Groves. The aim is to produce a nuclear bomb.

16TH OCTOBER: 40,000 people die during a hurricane and subsequent flooding in the Bay of Bengal in India.

30TH OCTOBER: British sailors board the U-559 submarine and recover the vessel's Enigma code machine and codebooks.

8TH NOVEMBER: 400 French resistance fighters in Algeria pave the way for the landing of 100,000 American and British troops in North Africa.

26TH NOVEMBER: the film "Casablanca" with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman premieres in New York.

10TH DECEMBER: Germans perform the first powered tests of the flying V1 bomb off the Baltic coast in Peenemünde.

1942

20TH JANUARY 1943: German air strike on a school in London, killing 41 children aged six to 14 years as well as six teachers.

24TH JANUARY: German papers bring bad news from the Eastern Front for the first time, while the radio plays sad music.

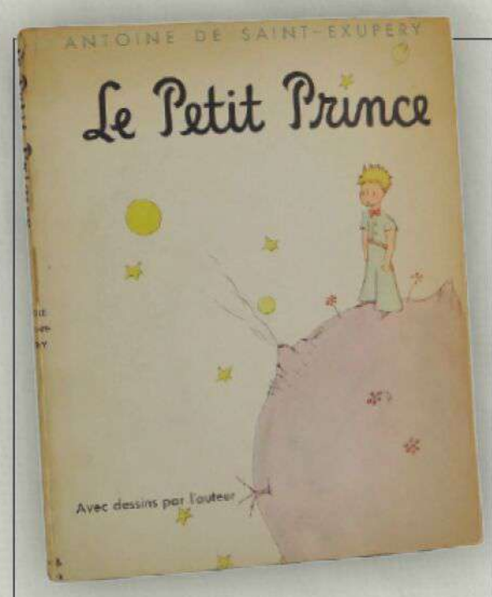
28TH FEBRUARY: six Norwegians successfully sabotage a heavy water plant at Vemork in Rjukan, Norway.



Young resist the regime

FEBRUARY Youths from the White Rose group hand out leaflets that call for resistance against the dictatorship. But few dare to challenge Hitler's iron grip on Germany.

13TH MARCH: the Finnish government signs a trade agreement with the Germans in Helsinki.



First publication of The Little Prince

6TH APRIL: the story of *The Little Prince*, written by French aristocrat and pilot Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, is published for the first time.

19TH APRIL: Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann first takes the psychedelic drug LSD that he's developed, and makes detailed notes of his experience.

26TH APRIL: thousands of Swedish anti-fascists protest a native Nazi congress at the Royal Mounds in Uppsala.

29TH APRIL: German pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, leading the church's resistance to Nazism, is arrested and later hanged in Flossenburg concentration camp.

12TH MAY: the Trident Conference begins in Washington DC with both Franklin D Roosevelt and Winston Churchill in attendance. The meeting results in agreement on the date for an Allied invasion of Europe: D-Day.

11TH JULY: Reichsführer Himmler orders the destruction of the ghettos in Poland.

29TH AUGUST: Germany dissolves the Danish government after a wave of strikes and riots.

8TH SEPTEMBER: the Italian Prime Minister surrenders the country unconditionally to British and US forces.

19TH OCTOBER: the first exchange of prisoners of war between Britain and Germany takes place in Gothenburg under the supervision of the Swedish Red Cross.

2ND DECEMBER: the German battleship *Scharnhorst* sinks in the Barents Sea after an Allied attack. Only 36 of the ship's 1,900 crew members survive.

Constant grief and hunger

1944 Cities lie in ruins, food is in short supply, and family after family is notified that a son or husband has been killed at the front. Morale declines in the Third Reich.

Read about German life in 1944 on page 158

2ND JANUARY: 13,000 Australian and US troops go ashore in Papua New Guinea to cut off a Japanese retreat.

27TH JANUARY: the Soviet Union breaks the two-year German siege of Leningrad and begins to drive the invaders back westward.

6TH JUNE: D-Day – Operation Overlord – begins. During the day 155,000 Allied soldiers land on the Normandy beaches.

9TH JUNE: Stalin launches the Vyborg-Petrozavodsk Offensive against Finland.

20TH JULY: Hitler survives an assassination attempt led by Claus von Stauffenberg.

24TH AUGUST: the Allies liberate Paris.

19TH SEPTEMBER: Finland and the Soviet Union sign a ceasefire agreement.

3RD DECEMBER: fierce fighting breaks out between communists and royalists in the liberated Greece.

16TH DECEMBER: Germany launches its last major offensive of the war with the Battle of the Bulge.

1943-44



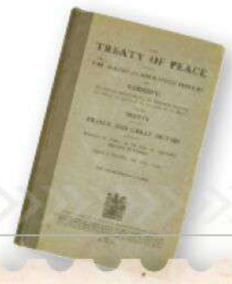


THE EARLY YEARS

1918 -1924

In 1918, a Bavarian locksmith founded the German Workers' Party. In September the following year, the party enrolled a new member – a pale, Austrian soldier with an unprecedented talent for speaking. Adolf Hitler became member no. 55 in the insignificant party. The next four years, he seized power in the workers' party, renamed it to the Nazis and built an army of young, brutal thugs who could crush any opposition. Having become known in Munich and surroundings as an angry, yet very gifted speaker, Hitler decided to carry through the Nazi revolution in Germany. His attempt failed.

1918-24



1918 The defeat in WWI leads emperor Wilhelm to abdicate.

1919 Adolf Hitler joins the German Workers' Party.

1919 Social Democrats proclaim Germany a republic.

1923 French troops occupy the Ruhr district. The economy collapses.



1923 Hitler attempts to seize power in a putsch.

1918 1919 1923



On 16 November 1919, Adolf Hitler's name appears on the list of attendants at a gathering in the German Workers' Party.

In the early autumn of 1919, 36-year-old captain Karl Mayr made a decision that would later start a world war. The officer in the German army's information service decided to send one of his subordinates to a political meeting in Munich. 30-year-old corporal Adolf Hitler was given the task of preparing a report about the newly established German Workers' Party. Mayr wanted to find out whether the members of the party were violent socialists who wanted to overturn the budding German democracy.

The captain's concerns were well-founded: Since World War I, workers, marines and communists had attempted to introduce dictatorship in the former empire. In fact, the revolutionaries had succeeded in turning Munich into a Soviet republic modelled on the USSR before being defeated by the army.

Around the same time, Adolf Hitler had been discharged from a military hospital after having returned from World War I, blinded by mustard gas. Now, he worked as an informant in the army's information service. Here, Hitler was monitoring political parties, extremist associations and the numerous semi-military organisations that were established by returned war veterans.

Bad speech agitates Hitler

On 12 September, on Mayr's order, Hitler trudged into the Sterneckerbräu beer cellar in Munich. Here, 41 members of the newly established German Workers' Party had gathered to discuss the future of the nation and, not least, rage against the harsh peace terms dictated by the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. Hitler listened without interest to a long lecture about the shocking reparations that Germany was to pay, especially to France. He looked around at the visitors, bored. The speaker talked dispassionately about bondage of interest and the huge sums earned by people in finance who lent out money.

These words were not new to Hitler. He had already attended at least 50 similar party meetings and heard many similar speeches. The young military informant decided that he had heard enough and had put on his coat, ready to leave, when a distinct voice was heard in the room. A new speaker had risen, agitatedly arguing for Bavaria's secession from Germany. The area was to become an independent state. These words sparked Adolf Hitler's political career. Hitler, a fierce nationalist, forgot about the task at hand and instantly engaged in a discussion with the man. He spoke at a high speed, agitated and gesticulating, spewing out words about treason and the unity of the German people. In a hoarse voice, he talked about a unified empire, a strong people and a Germany cleared of foreign races.

To the visitors in the beer cellar, there was nothing new in the foreign man's talk. These opinions were widespread among millions of Germans. What was new was Hitler's eloquence. The skinny, pale man expressed what everybody felt. His language was simple. His passion contagious.

The Treaty of Versailles forced Germany to give up large areas of land, incl. North Schleswig to Denmark.



As a protest, Hitler celebrates "Tag des Deutschen", even though the former national day, celebrating the victory over France in 1871, had been officially abolished in the Weimar Republic.

He began in a low voice, which turned to a high pitch when reaching the conclusion.

The chairman of the party – 35-year-old locksmith Anton Drexler – instantly saw the potential for the party. He said to the person sitting next to him:

"For Heavens' sake, that man has a big mouth. We can use him".

On that evening, Hitler was enrolled in the German Workers' Party as member no. 55. The party secretary added 500 to the number and enrolled him as no. 555 on the party card. Deliberately cheating with the numbers, he wanted the young party to appear larger than it really was.

Germany is disintegrating

At the time when Hitler started his political career, Germany was a disintegrating empire. Millions of disillusioned soldiers had returned from the war in 1918, bitter about the defeat. For fear of becoming the victim of a bloody revolution, emperor Wilhelm II abdicated and fled to the Netherlands. Over the next months, the country exploded in violent revolutions headed by workers who wanted to establish a communist republic modelled on the Soviet Union. Opposite them was the largest political party in Germany, the Social Democrats, which, supported by the army and Freikorps, fought to keep the country together.

The fighting raged for months, and in the shadow of the civil war, Germany's elected politicians met in the sleepy cultural city of Weimar. Here, they prepared a constitution for the country, which now had no emperor, and on 19 January 1919, they declared Germany a democratic republic. In the

DECISIVE MOMENTS

HITLER WAS TO MONITOR THE NAZIS

In 1919, the army ordered Hitler to infiltrate extremist parties in Munich. Here, he monitored communist protest marches (picture to the right) and was ordered to participate in gatherings arranged by the newly established German Workers' Party. Hitler was captured by the party's nationalistic rhetoric and anti-semitic opinions and after very the first meeting, he decided to enroll. Hitler's political career had begun.



GERMANY IN FLAMES

After World War I, Communist rebels put Germany ablaze. The following year, civil war ravaged the country.



In 1918, the German empire was a patchwork of small states. After its defeat in World War I, emperor Wilhelm resigned, and immediately after, revolutions broke out all over the country. While armed workers fought to create communist republics modelled on the Soviet Union, returned war veterans tried to defeat the rebels. The civil war raged for six months until the army had defeated the revolutionaries.

WILHELMSHAVEN

■ *In Kiel and Wilhelmshaven, the navy rebelled and, together with the workers, introduced several councils modelled on the Soviet Union. This was the start of the socialist revolution which spread across Germany.*

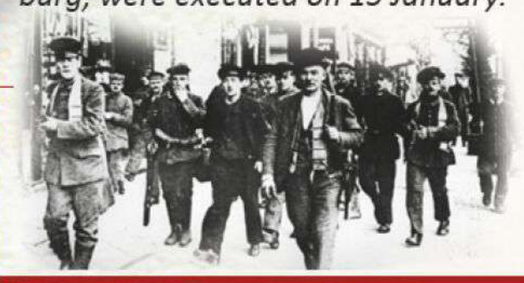


HAMBURG

■ *In November, 40,000 sailors and workers took to the streets and demanded that Hamburg be a communist city state. After short fights in the city centre, the rebels and the city government decided to set up soldiers' and workers' councils in factories, and the revolt died out.*

BERLIN

■ *In early 1919, war veterans crushed a communist rebellion. Hundreds lost their lives in the street fights, which did not end until the two Communist leaders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, were executed on 15 January.*



GERMANY

THE RUHR AREA

■ *Not a single shot was fired in the revolution in the German coal and steel district of Ruhr, as the mine owners got in ahead on the workers' possible demands and immediately introduced an 8-hour work day and recognised the trade unions – these two initiatives lessened the workers' anger.*

THURINGIA

■ *The seven small principalities of this area fell without fight. The princes fled, and the revolutionaries created a democratic state in the entire area and soon thereafter agreed to be incorporated into the rest of Germany.*

MUNICH

■ *Bavarian king Ludvig III was put to flight by communist rebels. For a month, Bavaria was a socialist republic with close ties to the Soviet Union, before the Freikorps and the army subdued the rebels.*



MUNICH:
Soldiers keep guard after having defeated the communist rebellion.



BERLIN:
Government troops have pulled up cannons in order to conquer a rebel position.



BERLIN:
Armed communist rebels in a street fight against war veterans.

spring, the Communist rebels were defeated, and the new republic now had a difficult task – the peace negotiations with the victors of World War I. The Social Democrats and the supreme command went to Versailles in France to negotiate.

Faced with the threat of new revolutions, continued fights, poverty and hunger, the new government capitulated completely. An extraordinarily harsh peace agreement was signed, which cost Germany dearly. Important territory was surrendered to France in the west while the newly established state of Poland was given a large portion of the eastern parts of Germany.

The army was cut back to 100,000 men, and the Allies, headed by France, demanded huge reparations. Not only money and gold. Locomotives, coal, grain and dairy cows, too, were sent across the border to France. To the Germans, the peace terms were not only shocking; they also sent the population head on into poverty.

An estimation from the autumn of 1919 concluded that one in three German pupils suffered from malnutrition, and dissatis-



> “Membership increased tenfold from 190 to 2,000, yet the party was only known in the Munich area”

FOUNDERS FROM ALL SOCIAL CLASSES

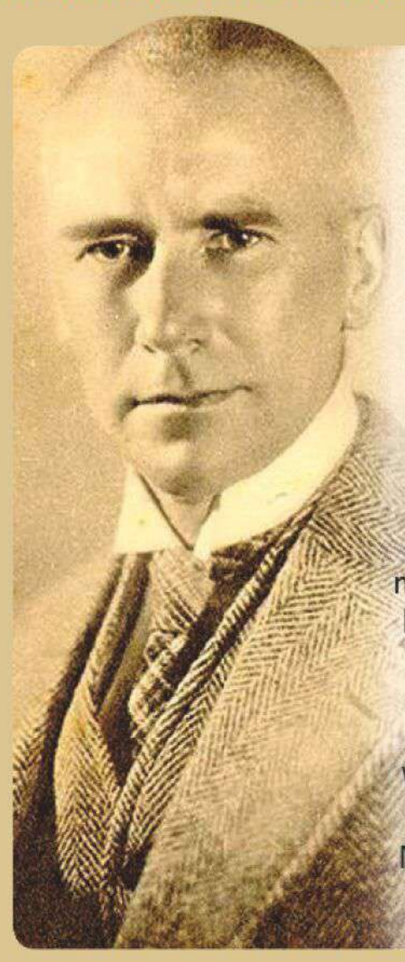
The first Nazis were a motley crowd of artists, workers and military men. All helped to build the Nazi Party and create the basis for Hitler's dictatorship. Few of them survived to see the total collapse of Germany in 1945.



ANTON DREXLER 1884-1942

Locksmith

■ Anton Drexler founded the Party in 1918 to entice workers away from socialism to nationalism. He headed the Party for two years before Hitler assumed power. Drexler ended up as an honorary member without influence.



WILHELM FRICK 1877-1946

Chief of police

■ From the beginning, the chief of the criminal police in Munich strongly sympathised with the Nazis. Frick took part in the Beer Hall Putsch and was sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment for high treason, but after his release he became one of the first Nazi members of the Reichstag. During WWII, he ended up as the patron of Bohemia and Mähren. He was executed for war crimes in 1946.



ERNST RÖHM, 1887-1934

Army captain

■ Ernst Röhm joined the Party the same year as Hitler. They became close friends and stood side by side in the Beer Hall Putsch in 1923. In 1930, he was made responsible for the SA corps, which he turned into Germany's largest paramilitary force. Röhm was murdered on Hitler's order on the Night of the Long Knives in 1934.

faction lurked everywhere. Some people blamed the Social Democrats for having accepted the unjust peace, while others blamed the Communists for setting the country on fire. Others believed that the Jews had profited greatly from the war and had subsequently betrayed Germany.

THE SA CREATED IN A RIOT

Like so many other Germans, Hitler was filled with hatred of Social Democrats, Communists and, not least, Jews. In his new party, the Austrian war veteran found a platform for his anger. Shortly after enrolling, Hitler made his first speech in front of 111 attendants in a beer cellar. For the first time, he discovered his ability to allure the attendants. The rumour about the eloquent Austrian travelled fast around Munich, and more and more people attended Hitler's speeches about the betrayal by the Jews, the demands to break loose from the chains of the Treaty of Versailles and the vision for a reconstructed Germany.

In November, he convinced Party Leader Drexler to spend the party's limited means on advertisements in the local newspaper, Münchener Beobachter.

The campaign was a success: Only 130 curious attendants showed up at a meeting in October; but four months later, the Party attracted 2,000 attendants to a rally at the Munich state brewhouse, Hofbräuhaus. Here, Hitler presented the party's new name. From now on, the German Workers' Party was to be known as the Nationalist Socialist German Workers' Party. He also launched the party's 25-point programme, prepared by Drexler and Hitler.

While Hitler was busy belching out words, a group of young men suddenly stormed the meeting. Political enemies, too, had become aware of the increasingly conspicuous party, and a group of Communists were now trying to make themselves heard above Hitler. Broad-shouldered war veterans quickly stormed toward the advancing opponents and let their fists do the talking, and the Communists soon took flight. Thus, the meeting not only saw the emergence of Nazism, but also of the party's so-called gym guards, who chose to wear the easily recognisable brown shirts as their uniform. Shortly after, the self-taught bodyguards changed their name to the Storm Detachment, Sturmabteilung, which became known as the SA.

Members of Stosstrupp Hitler at a drill in 1923. The group comprised Hitler's bodyguards, and in 1925, changed name to the SS.

FACTORY OWNER PAYS PARTY PAPER

In spite of the growing interest in the Nazis' angry rhetoric, the list of members only counted 193 names at the beginning of 1920. The members were a motley crowd of workers, office workers, public employees, school teachers, artists and university professors. To Hitler, this was a sign of the party's wide appeal. Together with Anton Drexler and head of the propaganda department Karl Harrer – a former sports journalist – he set out to make the Nazi manifesto known to a wider group of people.

The three men met with local representatives from the army, who listened with great enthusiasm to their ideas about stopping the Communist scourge and agreed to support the party with a small financial contribution every month.

The same message was given to the Nazi leaders by a local publisher, who had been longing for a party, which could pull the workers away from the controversial world Communism and attract them to German nationalism. At the same time, a factory owner from Munich gave the party a large



On 24 February 1920, Hitler presented the first Nazi party programme at Münchener Bräuhaus. 2,000 supporters listened enthusiastically to the demands for a racially pure Germany and the abolition of the Treaty of Versailles.

amount of money, aimed at purchasing a newspaper which could disseminate the Party's manifesto.

A local paper, Münchener Beobachter, with a print run of 8,000 papers and the ability to disseminate the Nazi opinions to a wide range of people, was chosen. Just after the purchase, the newspaper was renamed to Völkischer Beobachter and served as the Party's official mouthpiece until 1945.

HITLER IS "BEYOND COMPARE"

The small monthly payments were spent on boosting the propaganda. The Nazis printed posters on red paper to attract the working class, and volunteers posted them in the streets of Munich. The meetings were moved from the small, smoke-filled beer cellars into large, rented function rooms, and people flocked to hear Hitler speak. They listened patiently to the other speakers' boring lectures, only to get a glimpse of the fascinating, pale Austrian. Normally, they began to cheer when, as usual, he climbed up on a table so everybody could see him. Then, he would start his hour-long speeches. He emphasized his main points with violent gestures, stamped his feet angrily and shook his body. He often swept a lock from his fringe away from the face with a swift motion of the hand, and a fire was burning behind the intense blue eyes.

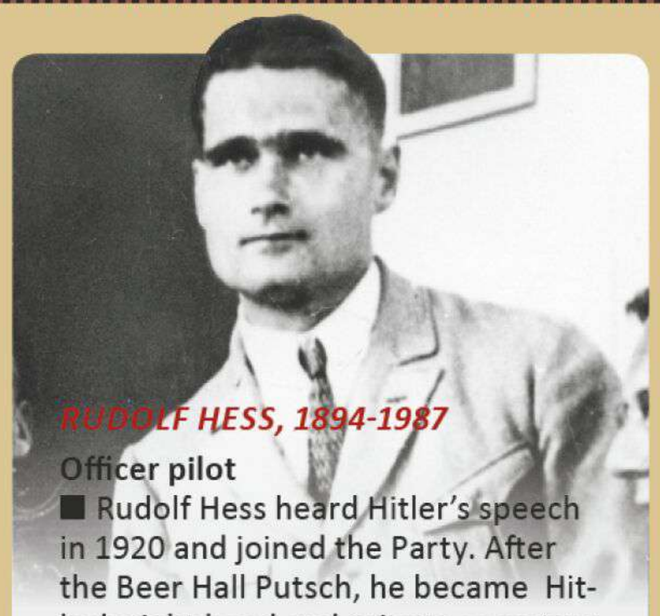
As so many others, Hans Frank, who became the infamous Nazi governor in Poland 20 years later, was at once spellbound. Frank looked with contempt at Hitler's



DIETRICH ECKART 1868-1923

Newspaper editor

■ Eckart was one of the Party founders and the editor of the Party newspaper Völkischer Beobachter. He took part in the Beer Hall Putsch, but died shortly after of a heart attack. Hitler dedicated part of "Mein Kampf" to Eckart.



RUDOLF HESS, 1894-1987

Officer pilot

■ Rudolf Hess heard Hitler's speech in 1920 and joined the Party. After the Beer Hall Putsch, he became Hitler's right hand and private secretary, and Hitler himself appointed Hess his political successor. In 1941, he fled to England in a fighter plane. After the war, he was given a life sentence in the Nuremberg Trials and was locked up in the Spandau prison in Berlin until his death at the age of 94.



ALFRED ROSENBERG 1893-1946

Architect

■ Alfred Rosenberg joined the Party in January 1919. He is regarded as the Nazis' race ideologist and designed the ideas about the superior Aryan race and its need for Lebensraum. Rosenberg was sentenced to death after the war and was hanged in 1946.



HERMANN GÖRING 1893-1946

Pilot hero

■ Göring joined the Nazi Party in 1922. Hitler admired the intelligent fighter pilot, who was given the task of building up the SA. He was forced to flee abroad after the Beer Hall Putsch, but returned in 1927. Later, Göring became President of the Reichstag, Prime Minister of Prussia and head of the Luftwaffe. Göring committed suicide in 1946.

> “The Germans went into the forests, collecting berries, nuts and mushrooms”



As a result of inflation, money earned one day was worthless the next. Instead, bread and potatoes were used as payment. This circus also accepted homemade marmalade as entry fees.

shabby, dark blue suit and loosened tie. But the words were spoken from the heart. He was completely beyond compare. No one spoke like him”, he later said about Hitler.

Like many others, Frank immediately joined the party, but although membership increased tenfold from 190 to 2,000 in the course of 1920, the party remained an insignificant local party, only known in Munich and the immediate surroundings.

Hitler seizes power

Among the angry and bitter people who became new members of the Nazi Party in 1920 were a few influential people. Ernst Röhm, captain in the army, had been responsible for arming the Bavarian Home Guard. He had important contacts and the support of a quarter of a million men, ready for action. Student Rudolf Hess, too, was allured by Hitler’s eloquence. He considered the Austrian to be a genius and called him “the leader who can bring our battle to victory”. Hess was hard-working and he was soon appointed Hitler’s personal secretary.

Although Drexler, the locksmith, was still the party chairman, most people now saw Hitler as the real leader of the Nazis. He was the only member of the leadership to receive a salary, and he spent his time reading newspapers and writing speeches. It therefore seemed natural that Hitler became chairman of the party in mid-1921. Until then, the party had been democratically governed by the leadership, but Hitler demanded full control of all decisions, and an overwhelming majority of the members voted in favour of this. The Nazis were now governed by a a single headstrong leader. One of Hitler’s first deeds was to order that the SA be organised as a professional corps. Soon after, the pilot Hermann Göring joined the Nazi corps.

Having won a number of daring victories during World War I, Göring was a national war hero, and his enrolment was noticed throughout Germany. Göring was given the task of building up the SA, and even though he only headed the Brownshirts for a year, Hitler was more than satisfied with the young pilot’s effort.

“I took an instant liking to him. He was the only one of the SA leaders who did a good job. He took over a scruffy group of men, and shortly after, we had a division of 11,000 soldiers ready for action”, Hitler wrote later.

Telephone poles caused crisis

In 1923, French soldiers marched into the German industrial areas in the Ruhr and took control over the factories. With the Treaty of Versailles, Germany had committed to pay 132 billion gold marks in reparations. Payment was made continuously, in money and in kind. Gold, coal and steel flowed over the border along with all sorts of other goods. But now, the Germans were late delivering 200,000 telephone poles, and France decided to force Germany to observe the Treaty of Versailles using force. With the invasion of the Ruhr area, more than three million Germans came under French military rule. In protest, the inhabitants initiated passive resistance. Mass strikes hit the area, and work in the mines stopped.

The subsequent lack of raw materials caused prices to explode, and suddenly, Germany was subject to the most bizarre inflation in world history. At the height of it, people would run through the streets with their wages in wheel barrows to buy food before the money lost its value.

A monthly wage lost its value within a few days. People could not buy coal or pay their gas bills. Many could not afford to buy food. Instead, the Germans went into the forests to pick berries and gather nuts and mushrooms, while professional gangs robbed fields for everything from potatoes to cabbage. Farmers hired armed men to protect their produce. The British newspaper, The Daily Mail, reported home that in the shops of Berlin, price signs were replaced every hour. One morning in July, the reporter saw a record player displayed in a window at half a million mark. Five hours later, the price had increased to 12 million mark.

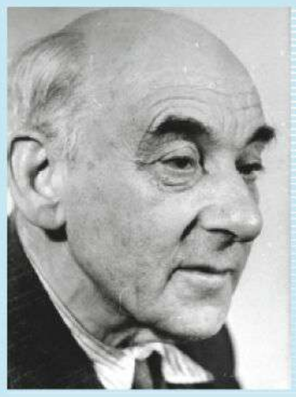
Inflation also made inroads into the German people’s savings. Pension savings, which had appeared secure in 1922, could not even buy a pack of butter. The printing press in the Reichsbank ran round the clock, spewing out notes with denominations in millions,

36 bn.
mark - the price of a pound of pork in 1923. A beer cost as much as 4 bn.

EYE WITNESSES

VICTOR KLEMPERER / hyperinflation 1923

WORTHLESS WAGES



“Germany is slowly collapsing in a very eerie way. Inflation is no longer just a figure in the newspaper. It affects our lives instantly. Yesterday, I was waiting for my money from the university’s payroll office from early morning until 2 p.m. I received nothing. Not even what was left from the October payment. Since yesterday, prices have doubled, and I have to pay twice as much for my gas bill compared with yesterday. For the gas bill alone, the difference between today and yesterday is some 150 bn. marks.”



billions and trillions.

Eventually, the bank gave up. Instead, old notes were stamped to show the new value. In the cities, the Germans were starving and winter was approaching. Now, four years after the civil war, Communist revolutions broke out in several cities again.

At the same time, war veterans, who felt humiliated by the French invasion in the Ruhr area, joined the Nazi party in great numbers. Within a short period of time, 20,000 men enrolled in Göring's SA corps.

GERMANY CONQUERED VIOLENTLY

In November 1923, the increasingly ambitious Hitler decided to seize power in Germany using violence. He was backed by a massive army of Brownshirts and was supported by leading officers in the army. He also formed an alliance with the Bavarian state commissioner Gustav Ritter von Kahr. The former Bavarian Prime Minister acted as a kind of dictator in the Land and agreed to support Hitler's putsch. One year earlier, the Italian Fascist leader, Benito Mussolini, had marched with 20,000 men from Milan towards Rome to seize power. The protest rally had disintegrated after a heavy downpour, yet the Italian king, Victor Emanuel III, had asked Mussolini to form a new government. Soon after, the Fascist leader introduced dictatorship. Now, the Nazis wanted to follow in the footsteps of the Fascists. First, backed by generals and von Kahr, they wanted to proclaim a new republic under Nazi rule in Munich. Hitler's army of Brownshirts would then march towards Berlin and demand that he be appointed chancellor.

HITLER DECLARES REVOLUTION

On Hitler's order, chaos broke out in Munich on 8 November 1923. Von Kahr and 3,000 Nazi sympathizers were at the Bürgerbräu beer hall when SA men stormed in. Astounded, the onlookers saw a heavy machine gun being pushed through the main door. Moments later, Hitler marched in, flanked by two bodyguards.

"The nationalist revolution has broken out", he screamed into the room. In the tumult, only few of the attendants had heard what Hitler had proclaimed. He therefore jumped up on a chair, pulled out his gun, raised it toward the ceiling and fired it.

"The nationalist revolution has broken out", Hitler repeated, stating that 600 armed men had surrounded the building.

Contrary to what had been agreed, state commissioner von Kahr did not stand in support of Hitler, who suffered the indignity of standing there all alone with his revolutionary talk. Furious, Hitler dragged von Kahr into an adjacent room and demanded his support. von Kahr was promised a number of important positions in the new regime, and the Bavarian politician once again agreed to support Hitler's putsch. Yet, in secrecy, Gustav Ritter von Kahr spent the rest of the night planning how the Bavarian police force could defeat the putsch.

2,000 NAZIS MARCHING

When Hitler returned to the hall, 58-year-old general Erich Ludendorff had joined

TECHNICAL..... CULTURE..... ECONOMY..... DAILY LIFE...



Berlin was a den of vice

In the 1920s, the German capital was buzzing with life. In the night club cabarets, Negros, risky dancers and transvestites performed side by side, while heterosexuals and homosexuals were enjoying the modern, American jazz music. The former good manners and noble behaviour of the Germans had, in many people's opinion, turned to uncontrolled liberalism and frivolity within a few years. The capital was called "the sinful Babylon", and older Germans longed for the strict morals of the empire.

A PARTY IS BORN

The Nazis were acutely aware of the importance of visibility from the beginning. The purchase of newspapers ensured that their revolutionary rhetoric reached a wide audience, and the sale of cigarettes worked as disguised advertising and financed the growing number of militant youths in the SA. Hitler's artistic ambitions were realised by creating the swastika flag, the party icon, made to impress in the streets, and membership cards were forged to make the Party appear larger.



Hat from Stahlhelm, the militant organsation. The swastika shows that the wearer supported the Nazis.



Party membership card belonging to Adolf Hitler, member no. 555.



One of Hitler's early sketches of a swastika flag.



Party cigarettes. Profits from the sale went to the SA army.

Various SA pins to put on the uniform.



>>>> the rebels. The Germans considered him a national hero after several spectacular victories against the Russians during World War I. Ludendorff's fear of the Communists had made him join the putsch, although he was not a Nazi Party member.

The next day, 2,000 Nazis marched towards the Ministry of War in Munich. They were loudly singing battle songs, and some of the people looking at the noisy procession spontaneously responded with the battle cry "Heil Hitler". When the procession walked into Odeonsplatz in central Munich, Hitler was in the front row. At his side were, in addition to general Ludendorff, a large number of future top Nazis, including Röhm, Hess and Göring. Along the Residentzstrasse near Odeonsplatz, a police force was blocking the way. During the night, the force had been gathered by Gustav Ritter von Kahr, who on the night before had sworn allegiance to Hitler. The Nazi leader never forgot the treachery – 11 years later, he had the Bavarian top politician murdered during the Night of the Long Knives. Yet here, in 1923 in the streets of Munich, Hitler ordered his men to advance. Suddenly, gun shots were heard in the square, and Hitler threw himself to the ground. He dislocated his left shoulder, and SA bodyguards pulled their leader into a side street, where a car was waiting. Hitler was quickly taken away. Göring, who had been shot in the thigh, managed to escape. Together with Rudolf Hess, he ended up in Austria, but returned following amnesty in 1927. Ernst Röhm was arrested during the incident, while the old general Erich Ludendorff continued toward the police lines under heavy fire. He surrendered, but was released at once on his word of honour as an officer. Rumour had it that Ludendorff never talked to Hitler again, as – following his flight – the general considered him to be a coward. The chaos lasted less than a minute, and while Hitler was taken away in a car, four policemen and 14 putschists lay dead in the cobblestone square.

RAIDS AGAINST THE NAZI PARTY

Immediately after the defeat of the putschists, raids were launched against the Nazi Party. The Party offices were stormed in the hunt for Hitler. The Party newspaper, Völkischer Beobachter, was closed and was issued a ban against publishing. Hitler him-

SAME TIME IN ITALY

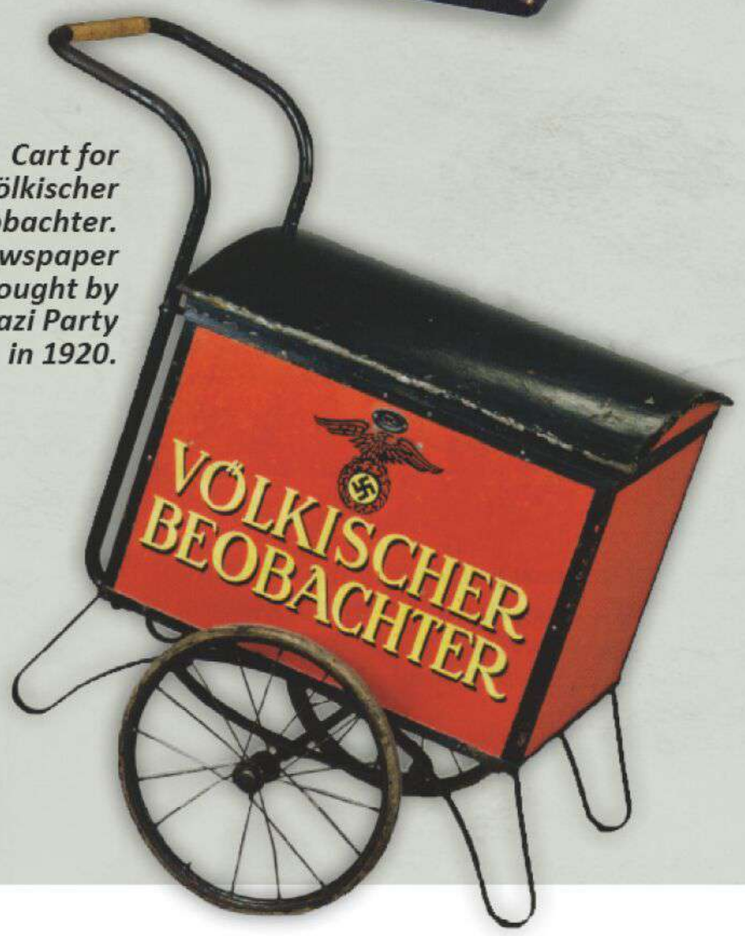


FASCISTS SEIZE POWER

The Italian Fascist leader Benito Mussolini (left) created the corps *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* (Italian Combat Leagues) in 1919, the purpose of which was to achieve peace in the Italian cities, which were plagued by unrest. The means was hordes of young men, known as the Blackshirts. In 1922, Mussolini marched toward Rome and seized power. Soon after, a cult emerged around *Il Duce* (the Leader). Hitler openly admired the Italian leader. He was very much inspired by Mussolini's Fascist party, and the Beer Hall Putsch in 1923 was a direct attempt to copy the Fascist seizure of power.



Remington, model 1924. Allegedly, the first part of "Mein Kampf" was written on this portable typewriter.



Cart for the Völkischer Beobachter. The newspaper was bought by the Nazi Party in 1920.



Banners used by the SA were full of Germanic symbols.

The German eagle.

The swastiska cross is an Indian symbol of happiness.

Abbreviation of the party name – Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei.

The inscription Deutschland Erwache is inspired by a Nazi battle song.

The colour red signifies the party's original socialist roots.

self was found by the police in the house of a Party member south of Munich. When they came for him, the Nazi leader was dressed in a white nightrobe; the dislocated left arm put in a sling. According to the residents of the house, the Nazi leader had considered suicide, but had been talked out of it. The police took their prominent prisoner to the prison near Landsberg am Lech, and put him in cell no 7.

To most Bavarians, Hitler's arrest came as a relief. One of the most famous writers of the time, Stefan Zweig, did little to hide his relief that "swastikas and storm troops disappeared out of sight and the name Adolf Hitler was almost forgotten". Together with Röhm and other Nazis, Hitler was taken to court in February 1924. General Ludendorff was also among the defendants. The defendants had committed high treason, caused the death of four policemen and held state employees hostage. Normally, the sentences would be harsh; traitors often paid with their lives.



Adolf Hitler during the election campaign in Munich, 1923. A few months later, he attempt to seize power in a violent putsch.

But the trial soon developed into a scandal. The district attorney refrained from calling important witnesses and destroyed evidence that would have compromised the defendants shortly before the trial began.

Judges side with Hitler

The public prosecutors were, like the German judiciary, notoriously right-wing, and nationalists were often given mild sentences for crimes committed for patriotic reasons. Judge Georg Neithardt did nothing to hide that he considered the Beer Hall Putsch a Nazi attempt to protect Germany against the Communist scourge.

Hitler used the trial as best he could. All Germans were following the reports from the courtrooms, and the Nazi leader enjoyed his opportunity to speak to the German people. He appeared in court wearing his Iron Cross – the military distinction he had received in World War I. He talked about his love of his fatherland and his fierce will to defend Germany.

Within a few weeks, Hitler went from being a local Bavarian rebel to become known all over Germany as a man who had

> “Hitler had taken the biggest risk ever and failed miserably”

done his utmost to save the fatherland in its most difficult hour. On 1 April 1924, Adolf Hitler was sentenced to five years' imprisonment – a very lenient sentence.

Ludendorff was aquitted. The Court found that the general had not known what had been going on – Ludendorff took this as an insult. Ernst Röhm was found guilty, but set free.



The defendants from the Beer Hall Putsch. Next to Hitler (no. 4 from right) are future SA leader Ernst Röhm and general Ludendorff.

Hitler appoints his successor

Hitler had taken the biggest risk in his life ever and failed miserably. He was in prison, his closest allies were fleeing or in exile abroad, his storm troopers had disintegrated and the party had been banned from running in the coming election.

Having received his sentence, Hitler summoned Alfred Rosenberg, a loyal party member, to the prison in Landsberg. The Nazi leader had decided to pass the control of the party to the 30-year-old architect, who had been a Party member since the beginning. Rosenberg was recognised among Nazi members as the brain behind the Nazis' Aryan race theories.
He enjoyed the trust of many of the Nazis, yet Hitler regarded Rosenberg as slightly lazy and unambitious. With him as the leader, Hitler's power would not be challenged during the five years he was to remain in prison. Rosenberg was indeed very loyal.

His first action was to send postcards with Hitler's portrait to local Party groups, sports associations and rightwing clubs, stating that Adolf Hitler's name must never be forgotten.

At the general election in May 1924, Hitler and Alfred Rosenberg devised a method to sidestep the election ban. The Nazis quite simply appeared on the register of the nationalist German Völkisch Freedom Party. Following Hitler's trial a month before, meticulously covered by the media, the Nazis had their best election so far. Over two million Germans voted for the electoral alliance, 6.5 per cent of the electorate. The two parties, which went by the name National Socialist Freedom Movement, won 32 seats in the Reichstag out of the 472 seats in total.

However, just six months later, at the election in December, the Germans had almost forgotten the trial and Hitler's nationalist monologues. The movement lost more than half of their mandates, ending up with just 14. Less than one million Germans voted for the coalition. Also, the economic crisis in Germany had subsided. The republic calmed down, and most Germans experienced a short period of happiness.

Hitler, however, spent his days in the Landsberg prison devising ambitious plans for the future of himself, the Nazis and Germany. ■

FROM HOMELESS TO FAMOUS

In 1913, Hitler eked out a living by selling home-made watercolour paintings. 10 years later, all the Germans were following the trial against the Austrian rebel.



1889

Adolf Hitler is born on 20 April at the inn, Gasthof zum Pommer in Braunau, Austria.



1907

Hitler's mother, Klara Pölzl, dies of breast cancer. His father, customs officer Alois Hitler, died 4 years earlier.

1907

The art academy in Vienna rejects 18-year-old Hitler, who has a burning desire to become a painter. To survive, Hitler sells home-made postcards to people in the streets.

1909

Hitler is once again rejected by the art academy. The orphaned Austrian has left his inheritance to his sister. He takes rooms at a shelter. The next four years, Hitler ekes out a living in Vienna.

1913

To avoid military service, Hitler moves to Munich. German police arrest the Austrian immigrant and force him to appear before the draft board. A doctor declares him unfit for service in the army.

The Nazi putschists march into the Odeonsplatz in Munich. After a brief exchange of shots with the police, Hitler's putsch is over.

1914

World War I breaks out. Hitler talks the Bavarian king into letting him fight for Germany. He serves as an orderly and receives the Iron Cross for his courage.



1918

Hitler spends a few months at a military hospital in Germany, blinded by mustard gas. Once discharged, he is employed as a spy in the army's intelligence service.

1919

Joins the German Workers' Party, which later becomes the Nazi Party.

1921

The members of the Nazi Party appoint Hitler absolute leader.

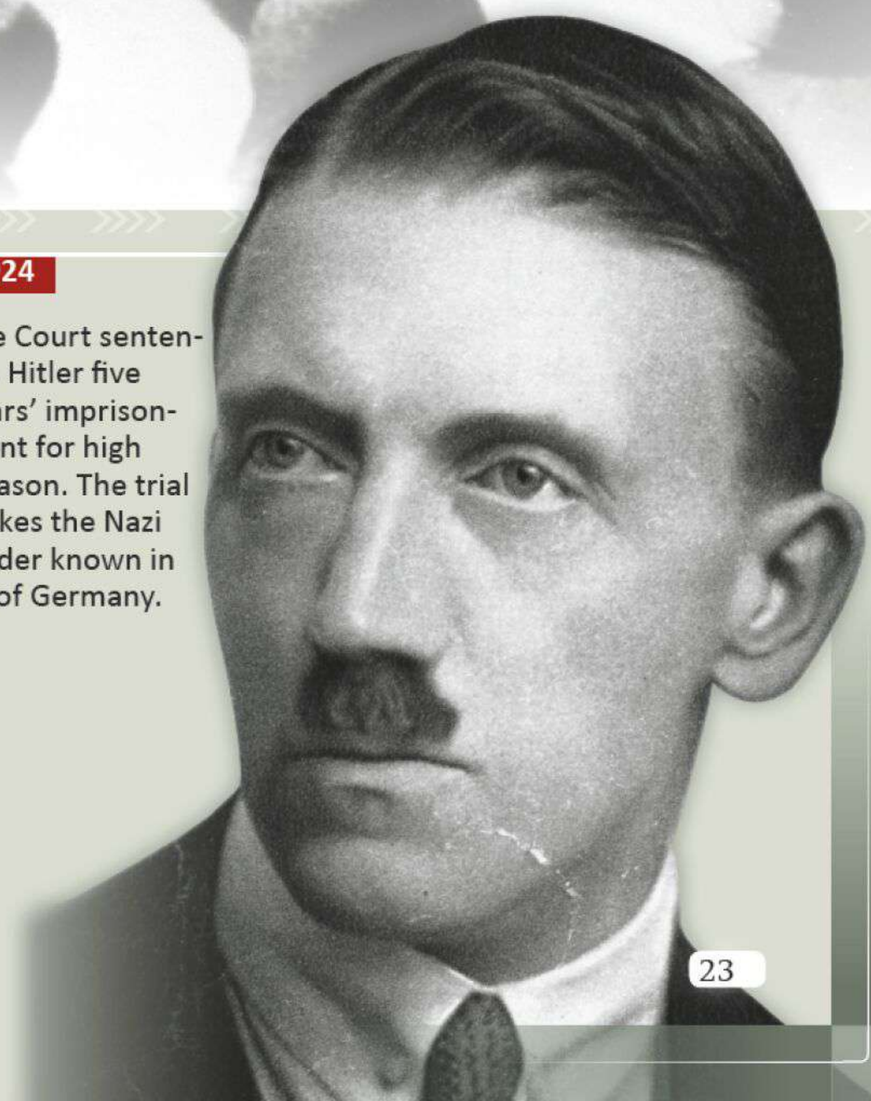


1923

Adolf Hitler attempts to seize power in Germany with violence. The putsch fails.

1924

The Court sentences Hitler five years' imprisonment for high treason. The trial makes the Nazi leader known in all of Germany.



1924



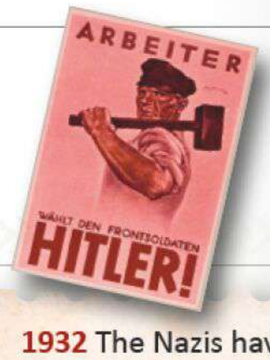


A VISION DEVELOPS

1924-1933

Adolf Hitler left the Landsberg prison in southern Bavaria as a new man. He had spent his nine months behind bars drafting visions for a future Nazi empire headed by himself. Even disastrous elections, public speaking bans and temporary bans against the SA and the SS could no longer stop the ambitious Nazi leader. Over the next nine years, Hitler won the favour of the German people through a combination of political ingenuity, street violence and favourable circumstances.





1924-33

1924 After nine months, Hitler leaves prison as a free man.

1925 Paul von Hindenburg is elected President.

1929 The stock exchange in Wall Street, NY, collapses.

1932 The militant SA and SS organisations are banned by President von Hindenburg.

1932 The Nazis have their best election so far. It is now Germany's largest party with 37 per cent of all votes.

1933 Adolf Hitler is appointed Germany's new Chancellor.

1924 1925 1929 1932 1933

Adolf Hitler had plenty of time for reflection in 1924. After the failed putsch in 1923, he had been incarcerated in the Landsberg prison in southern Bavaria. Although the National Socialist leader was, in reality, a convict, he did not suffer any distress in the old fort. From his cell, he looked down at the River Lech, which softly wound its way through the South German countryside. Hitler's defence speeches and National Socialist tirades at the trial had impressed the prison guards, who treated Hitler as a guest of honour and let his friends and fellow party members visit with gifts to make life easier for their imprisoned leader.

Hitler later explained that his vision about becoming the Führer of Germany gathered momentum in the prison. During hour-long sessions, he dictated his ideas about Germany, Nazism and himself to his loyal assistant, the student Rudolf Hess, who wrote down every word. Hitler told Hess about his visions for the future Nazi Germany. In history, there had been two German empires: The Holy Roman Empire, which collapsed in the 1800s, and the empire that Bismarck had gathered at the end of the 19th century. Hitler wanted to create the Third Reich – a large German state populated by Aryans and with Hitler as the Führer.

264 days
was Hitler incarcerated in the Landsberg prison before being pardoned for good conduct.

Friends helped Hitler get out

Hitler's time in prison was surprisingly short in spite of his five-year sentence. Hitler had friends in high places who worked intensively to have him pardoned – and they succeeded. On 20 December 1924, after only nine months, 35-year-old Adolf Hitler walked out of the prison as a free man.

If Hitler had expected a procession in his honour, he would have been disappointed. Germany had changed considerably since the failed Nazi putsch in 1923. Millions of dollars had begun to flow into the country from the USA in the form of inexpensive loans. At the same time, France had loosened its grip around the industrial areas in the Ruhr district. The large-scale financial crisis had been replaced by hope, and the Germans were enjoying the new post-crisis era. Families had enough to eat and in the cities, cultural life was flourishing. The Nazi Party, on the other hand, was in dire straits. The Interior Minister of Bavaria had banned the party from running in the Land election and had also banned Hitler from speaking at public meetings. At the election in December 1924, the Nazis saw their number of votes halved to just under a million, and the leaders seriously considered giving up and disbanding the Party.

At this – for the Nazi Party – critical moment, Hitler withdrew to a one-bedroom flat at the top floor of Thiersch Strasse 41 in Munich. Here, he finished dictating the first part of his book "Mein Kampf" and devised a plan to rebuild the Party. In prison, Hitler had decided that he was done with military coups. Now, he wanted to assume power by lawful means, using the weapons of his political opponents on themselves.

Newspaper strengthens Party

On 16 February 1925, the Nazi Party and its press were once again made legal, and 11 days later, Adolf Hitler spoke at a mass meeting for the first time since the Beer Hall Putsch. After Hitler's two-hour speech, the 4,000 attendants broke out into a thunderous roar. Their joy was short-lived, however, as Hitler's aggressive rhetoric instantly led to a new public speaking ban

Hitler speaks to a group of businessmen. This meeting is one of the first ones after the cancellation of the ban to speak.



PAUL VON HINDENBURG *1847-1934*

THE PEOPLE'S FATHER

■ Paul Ludwig Hans Anton von Beneckendorff und von Hindenburg belonged to an old aristocratic family from East Prussia. Having completed his naval cadet training in Berlin, he showed his courage and military talent in the wars against Austria (1866) and France (1871). Hindenburg retired as a highly-decorated general in 1911, but rejoined the army in World War I, where he stopped the Russian advance from the east. The general gained hero status and was appointed commander-in-chief. In 1925, Hindenburg became the second President of the new Germany. Seven years later, the popular general beat the impetuous Hitler in the presidential election. The year after, against his will, he appointed Hitler Chancellor, hoping that the Nazi leader could ensure political peace. Hindenburg died of lung cancer in his home in East Prussia in 1934.

German war hero – commander-in-chief in World War I – President in the Weimar Republic



– this time for two years. Temporarily subdued, Hitler began to focus his efforts on building the Nazi Party from within. Hitler wanted to organise the Party with a clear leader – himself – and thousands of small branches. The Nazi Party was to grow from Bavaria and be set up all over Germany.

The young prodigy, Gregor Strasser, was given the task of organising the Party in and around Berlin, areas notorious for being socialist and communist strongholds. Strasser founded the newspaper Berliner Arbeiterzeitung and hired the 28-year-old fanatic nationalist, Joseph Paul Goebbels, as the secretary of the newsletter. This turned out to be a choice that the Nazis would never regret. With a university degree, an unusually mordant writing style and an ability to seduce the masses, Goebbels would be worth his weight in gold.

This pattern was repeated all over the country. The purchase of newspapers, strong propaganda and grandiose rhetoric attracted mainly young people and veterans from World War I to the Party. At the end of 1925, the Nazis had 27,000 paying members. In 1926, this number had almost doubled to 49,000, and in 1927, once again doubled to 108,000.

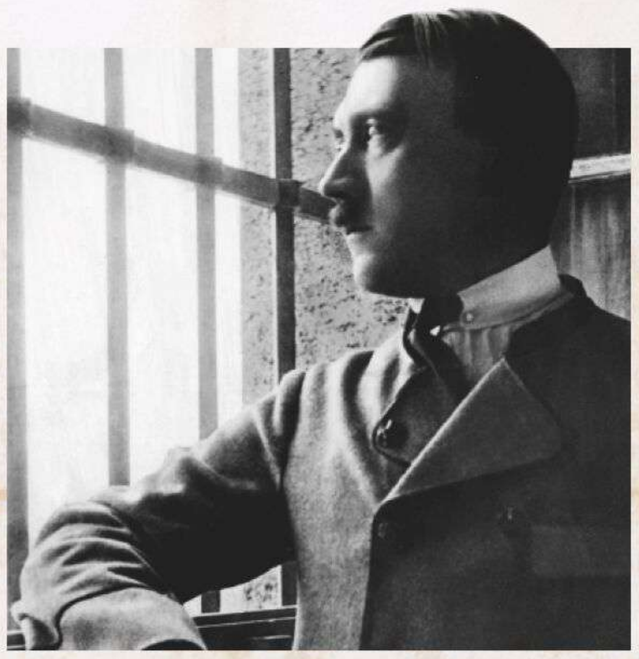
Fight corps reorganised

While rebuilding a seemingly normal political party, Hitler also reorganised the SA. In the early 1920s, the Brownshirts had mostly been used as street fighters for Hitler. Now, they were organised with military discipline into an armed group that was to protect the Nazi meetings, and – just as important – harass and terrorise political opponents.

Hardened and brutal war veterans and restless youth flocked to the SA, lured by the sense of community, the uniforms and the possibility to engage in fist fights with the Communists' street corps. In small groups and armed with clubs, the storm troops instigated war in the German streets in an attempt to make people long for a strong man who could bring peace. The most promising, strong and loyal ones were picked out to form the backbone of the newly-established Schutz-staffel – Hitler's personal security guard. The elite of the Nazi bodyguards were known as the SS.

THE NAZI BIBLE WAS WRITTEN IN PRISON

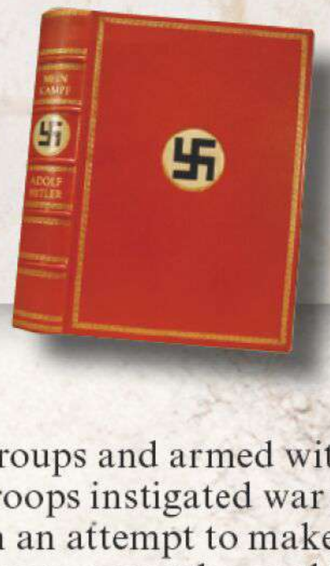
During his stay in the Landsberg prison, Hitler started to put his vision about a future Nazi Germany into words. "Mein Kampf" would become the Bible of National Socialism, although the sales figures were modest until the seizure of power in 1934. From 1936, all newly-wed Germans were given a copy as a wedding present, and soldiers on the front always brought a copy. When the Third Reich collapsed in 1945, more than 10m Germans had a copy.



From his prison cell in Landsberg, Hitler dictated Nazi visions to his secretary

"Life never forgives weakness"
...about the need for a strong leader

"The dark-haired Jewish boy lies in wait for the innocent German girl and poisons her with his blood"
...about racial purity



"Mein Kampf" was published in July 1925, paid by the Party.

In May 1928, the Nazis suffered yet another disastrous election. Only 800,000 voters voted for the Party headed by the Austrian corporal. Hitler and the Berlin leaders, Strasser and Goebbels, continued steadily and developed the Party to make it strong enough to seize power once the times were more favourable.

GERMANY COLLAPSES

The turning point came before they had even expected themselves. In October 1929, the free and carefree times came to a sudden end. The American stock exchange on Wall Street collapsed, and Germany was one of the first victims. The loans from the USA stopped, and before long, production was halved. Thousands of Germans were laid off and joined the rapidly growing queues of unemployed people.

The situation soon developed from bad to desperate. The year after, millions of people were left without a job, and young Germans in particular were hoping for a future without depression and unemployment. Every day, the queues to the soup kitchens grew longer. Although the Germans were starving, Hitler could not contain his enthusiasm. He wrote the following in one of the Nazi Party's newspapers: "Never in my life have I been so happy. The harsh realities have opened the eyes of millions of Germans to the swindle, lies and deceit by the Marxist impostors".

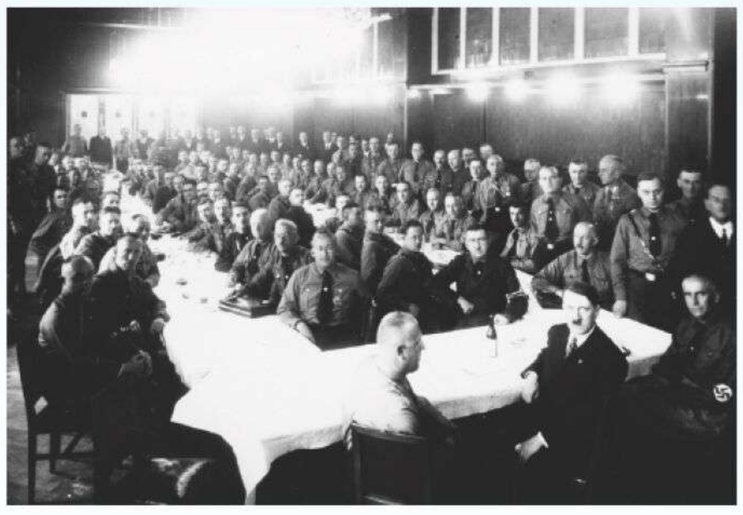
> "Every day, the queues to the soup kitchens grew longer. While the Germans were starving, Hitler was enthusiastic"

During the 1930 election campaign, he told the disillusioned voters that he would create a powerful Germany. The debt to the USA was not to be repaid, Hitler promised, and he strongly rejected the humiliating Treaty of Versailles from 1919. Hitler would crush corruption and put the wealthy capitalists in their place – especially the greedy Jewish ones. He lured the nationalist voters with promises of rebuilding the country's proud army and demand a return of the areas that were lost after World War I. Unemployed people were promised work and food, and the middle class fell for the bombast against the unrest and violence in the republic – ironically, Hitler's own SA was responsible for most of the violence in the streets. The hateful rhetoric about Jews and socialists sent shivers down the spines of most Germans, but many liked the vision of a powerful Germany. The old feelings of patriotism and nationalism returned after having been dormant during the first ten years of the republic.

The Germans were attracted by Hitler's rhetoric, and the election result on 14 September 1930 was overwhelming: The National Socialists won a total of 6,409,600 votes and thus 107 seats in the Reichstag. Together with the greater influence, the election result had an unexpected effect. The Nazis' success convinced not only millions of people from the German middle class that Hitler was Germany's salvation; now, businessmen, the upper class, Prussian nobility and military men were eager

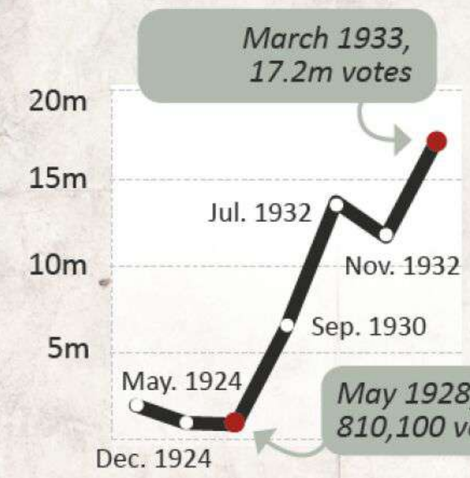


Marching SA troops cheer at Hitler in 1927. The Brownshirts were to create insecurity in the streets and suppress political opponents.



The 107 popularly elected Nazi members at the opening of the Reichstag in October 1930. More than six million Germans voted for the Party, which gained 18 per cent of all votes.

INCREASE IN BROWN VOTES





When the financial crisis hit Germany in 1929, support for the Nazis exploded. Unemployed people were lured with promises of food and work, while the middle class saw the Nazis as the last defence against the Communist scourge. Also, veterans and military people fell for Hitler's promises of recreating a strong Germany.

to join the Nazi Party. Everybody looked to the strong man who vowed to rebuild the German empire. With his newly-won power, Hitler concentrated on the powerful groups that he could use in the future: The army and the large German industrialists.

In the last half of 1931, he therefore crisscrossed Germany to secretly meet prominent businessmen who could finance future elections, new propaganda campaigns and not least pay for uniforms and flags to the hundreds of thousands of men who were now serving in the SA and SS.

HITLER BECOMES GERMAN

In January 1932, the Nazi Interior Minister in the Land of Braunschweig appointed Adolf Hitler attaché – and thus a German citizen. Citizenship was vital to Hitler, who was Austrian, as only Germans were allowed to run for president in the election later that year. Although the current President, Paul von Hindenburg, was very popular among the Germans, Hitler decided to challenge him. In a veritable working frenzy, he launched the Party into an intense election campaign orchestrated by Goeb- >>>>>



TECHNICAL..... CULTURE..... ECONOMY..... DAILY LIFE.....



The crash changed everything

On 18 October 1929, the American stock exchange in Wall Street crashed. Within a week, the value of shares plummeted by a third. The crisis culminated Tuesday 29 November when the hard-hit investors lost 13 per cent of their fortune. The crash left millions of people ruined and was the direct cause of the world-wide depression, which ravaged in the 1930s. The crisis hit Germany extra hard, as the budding export came to a halt, and the American banks demanded that their huge loans to German financiers be repaid.

bels and Strasser and with a vigour that had never been seen before in Germany. The German towns and cities were plastered with more than a million colourful posters, and local Party supporters went on the streets and handed out pamphlets. The party's printing office worked hard to spew out the more than 12 million extra newspapers during the election months. At the same time, Hitler made use of modern technology. Under the ambiguous slogan "Hitler over Germany" he flew from city to city in a rented plane and spoke at mass meetings in 20 cities in only six days. More than one million people attended the election meetings.

Throughout the election campaign, Brownshirts had ravaged in the streets, and on election day, 10 April, SA leader Ernst Röhm ordered 400,000 Brownshirts on the streets in and around Berlin. The German army feared a coup attempt, and there were rumours about civil war. Despite the Nazis' threats, street violence and the streamlined election campaign, Hindenburg regained the presidency. Hitler came second. 13.5 million Germans voted for the Nazi Party leader.



1932: Hitler had his eyes set on the presidency. A rented plane allowed him to speak in hundreds of cities during the campaign.

HINDENBURG IS "A FOOL"

Immediately after his re-election, Hindenburg banned the two paramilitary Nazi corps, the SA and SS, but also invited Hitler to a conversation in his residence. The strong dislike between the two was apparent, and while Hitler often referred to the president as "an old fool", Hindenburg spoke with contempt about Hitler as "the Bohemian corporal". At the meeting, Hitler guaranteed that peace would return to the streets provided that Hindenburg lifted the ban against the SA and the SS.



Shortly after the seizure of power, a large number of streets and squares all over Germany were renamed and given the name of the new Chancellor.

What was even more important to the Nazi leader was for the President to dissolve the Reichstag and call a general election. With more brute force from the storm troopers and an efficient election campaign, the Nazis would gain a majority in the Reichstag and force Hindenburg to install Hitler as Chancellor. The euphoria over an impending seizure of power reached to the Nazi top. Goebbels wrote in his diary:

"Hitler's conversation with the President went well… The Reichstag has been dissolved. There will be an election! Election! We are all very happy".

The fierce fights between the SA and the Communists' semi-military corps in particular now exploded in the German cities. In Prussia, at least 82 young men were beaten to death in street fights in June. The SA also terrorised businessmen, professors, teachers and civil servants who protested against the Nazi policy.

Hitler's statements about restoring calm in the republic reached gigantic crowds. On 27 July 1932 – four days before the election – Hitler spoke to 60,000 people in Brandenburg and to almost as many in Potsdam, and more than 120,000 fanatical supporters greeted him with cheers at the huge Grünewald Stadium in Berlin.

The election campaign was a success. The Nazis won 230 seats in the Reichstag and became the largest party in Germany. In just four years, Hitler had won more than 13 million Germans over on his side. Still, the ageing Hindenburg declined to appoint the aggressive Nazi leader Chancellor of his government. He chose the leader of Zentrum, the German centre party, Franz von Papen.

The President was the supreme leader of the army and, in times of crisis, could pass laws, bypassing the Reichstag.

HITLER BECOMES CHANCELLOR

Without the Nazis' cooperation, von Papen was unable to get his bills passed. Instead, he called yet another general election, this time in November. The voters were no longer interested in election campaigns and propaganda, and many Nazi Party members were losing their drive. This showed in the results. The Party lost two million votes and 34 seats in the Reichstag. Hitler was in a weaker negotiating position, and his vision for the Third Reich seemed further away. This time, the chancellorship went to the Conservative military man, Kurt von Schleicher.

After just two months, locked in a political mess of Nazis, Communists and democratic forces that worked against each other, Schleidher begged the President to dissolve the Reichstag and establish a temporary military dictatorship. This would make it possible to ban the Nazi Party, the SA and anyone "who endangered the future of the Republic". Hindenburg declined, and Schleicher stepped down as Chancellor in January 1933.

Fear about the future and total breakdown hung heavy over the Republic on 29 January, when 10,000 workers gathered in the centre of Berlin to demonstrate against Hitler, who was staying in his room at the fashionable Kaiserhof Hotel in Berlin.

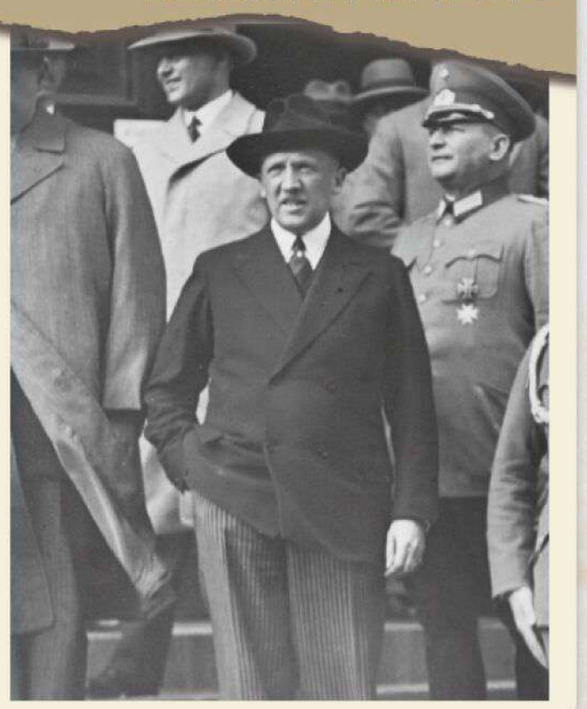
On 29 January in the afternoon, he and Goebbels had been told by an enthusiastic Göring that were was a rumour that Hitler would be appointed Chancellor.

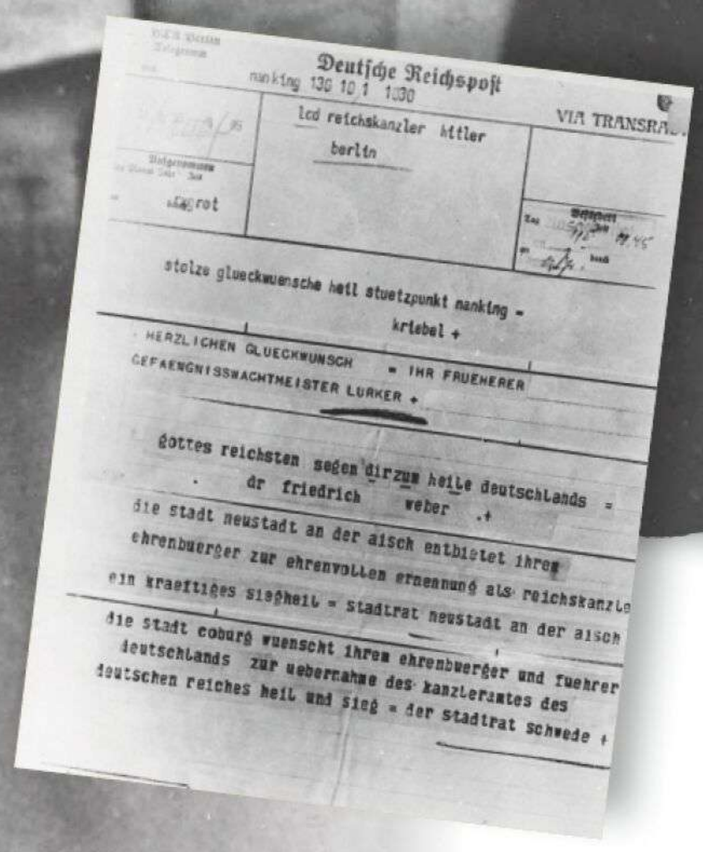
Hitler waited for 24 hours and was then summoned to the Reich Chancellery, where Hindenburg was waiting. In the darkest hour of the Republic, the old President looked to the man he thought could bring together the political parties and the only one who would control the frightening SA army. It had been 14 years since Hitler enrolled in the Nazi Party, and with the President's demand for full collaboration for the country's well-being, Adolf Hitler was sworn in as new Reich Chancellor on 30 January 1933. ■

DECISIVE MOMENTS

CHANCELLOR RESIGNED

On 17 November 1932, Franz von Papen gave in. The former lieutenant-colonel had headed a minority government for four months and, increasingly frustrated, seen his attempt to govern be blocked by Social Democrats, Communists and Hitler's Nazi Party. Von Papen therefore reluctantly left the chancellorship to his Defence Minister, Kurt von Schleicher, with whom he fell out right away. The hatred between the two former colleagues grew, and von Papen became a fierce advocate for Adolf Hitler as a new head of government in Germany – which became a reality in February 1933.




Deutsche Reichspost

nanking 130 10 1 1030

VIA TRANSRA

lcd reichskanzler hitler
berlin

rot

stolze glueckwuensche heil stuetzpunkt nanking =
kriebel +

HERZLICHEN GLUECKWUNSCH = IHR FRUEHERER
GEFAENGNISSWACHTMEISTER LURKER +

gottes reichsten segen dirzum heile deutschlands =
dr friedrich weber .+

die stadt neustadt an der aisch entbietet ihrem
ehrenbuerger zur ehrenvollen ernennung als reichskanzle
ein kraftiges sieghеil = stadtrat neustadt an der aisch

die stadt coburg wuenscht ihrem ehrenbuerger und fuehrer
deutschlands zur uebernahme des kanzleramtes des
deutschen reiches heil und sieg = der stadtrat schwede +

Congratulatory messages poured in to Germany's new Chancellor. Here, from the city of Neustadt.

“On 30 January 1933, Hitler was sworn in as Germany's new Chancellor”





CONFRONTING THE PAST

1933-1934

In 1933, when Adolf Hitler was installed as Reich Chancellor, he started a manhunt on his opponents. The frail German democracy fell victim to a brutal and violent campaign initiated by Hitler and executed by the hundreds of thousands of thugs from the SA corps. The first victims included the arch enemies in the Communist Party. Later followed Social Democrats, trade union leaders and anybody who might pose a threat to the power of the newly-elected Chancellor. It only took one year for Hitler to destroy the German democracy and introduce a ruthless dictatorship.



The Reichstag fire enabled Hitler to tighten the grip on his opponents.



The Dutch Communist Marinus van der Lubbe was sentenced to death for arson.

> “No more mercy. Anyone standing in our way will be slaughtered”

1933-34

1933 The Reichstag is on fire. The Communists are blamed.

1933 First concentration camp in Dachau, Munich.

1933 Hitler allowed to pass laws on his own.

1934 SA leader Ernst Röhm airs thoughts about removing Hitler in a putsch.

1934 Fear of internal rebellion makes Hitler purge several SA leaders, first and foremost Ernst Röhm.

1934 Hindenburg dies. Hitler appoints himself Führer.

1933 1934

On the evening of 30 January 1933, Berlin lit up in the glow from thousands of torches. Hordes of uniformed Brownshirts from the SA stamped through the capital in a procession to celebrate Germany’s new Reich Chancellor. After them followed army veterans and cheerful citizens. A pro-Nazi newspaper enthusiastically reported that at least 700,000 people took part in the celebrations, and although the actual number was more likely a tenth of that number, the luminous rivers of torches were a frightening demonstration of power. The procession did not only herald a new era with Adolf Hitler as Reich Chancellor, but also the impending end to Germany’s young democracy.

Having witnessed the marching masses, the ageing general Erich Ludendorff sent a bitter warning to Reich President Paul von Hindenburg, who had appointed Hitler Chancellor on that day: “I solemnly prophesy that this man will cast our nation into the abyss and bring incomprehensible suffering upon our country. Future generations will be cursing you in your grave for your actions”, wrote Ludendorff. As late as in 1928 he had been a loyal supporter of Hitler and had even participated in the Beer Hall Putsch in 1923, alongside Hitler.

The suffering, predicted by Ludendorff, would come earlier than the old general had feared. Although Hitler was watching the torchlight procession from a window in the Reich Chancellery with satisfaction, the newly-appointed Chancellor was not happy to share the power of government with his national conservative supports. Therefore, Hitler persuaded Reich President Hindenburg to call another election to be held one month later, on 5 March 1933. Hitler hoped to beat his political opponents and gain absolute majority in the Reichstag.

The Communist Party, KPD, was the third largest German party in early 1933, backed by 17% of the voters.

GÖRING IN CONTROL OF POLICE

Although the Nazis had only won very few ministerial offices in the new coalition government under Hitler, they had secured two of the most important ones. Wilhelm Frick and Hermann Göring had been appointed German Interior Minister and Interior Minister for the largest Land, Prussia, respectively – and thus they had been given the responsibility for upholding law and order. The power of the police was to a great extent in the hands of these two top Nazis.

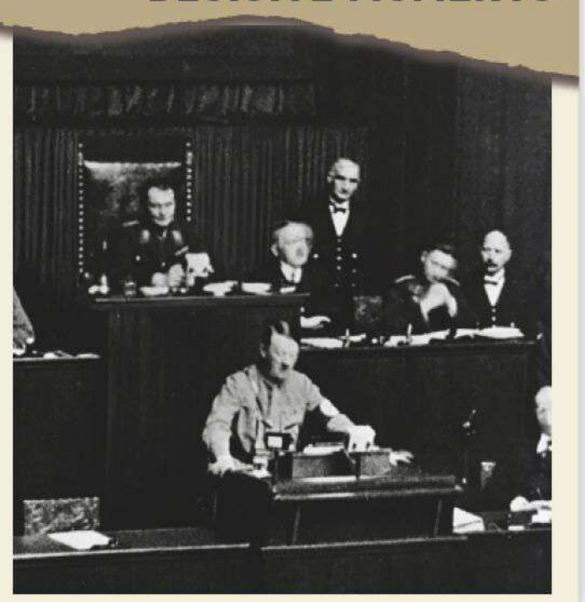
In mid-February, Hermann Göring ordered the Prussian police to stop all monitoring of the Nazis and their paramilitary forces in the SA and the SS. On 22 February, he went further and set up an entire corps of supporting police, which, on paper, was to help the ordinary German police maintain peace before the election campaign. Thousands of young Nazis from the SA and the SS were hired to fill the ranks of the new corps, and armed with clubs and guns, patrolled the cities of Prussia, including Berlin.

Göring’s enrolment of Nazis in the police corps was essential, as the capital was one of the few remaining Communist strongholds. Thus, the assisting police could harass the Social Democrats and Communists, who were the Nazis’ fiercest competitors. Both parties were backed by strong trade unions and large electorates.

DECISIVE MOMENTS

SPECIAL ACT SECURED POWER

On 23 March 1933, at Hitler’s request, the German Reichstag was to vote for the so-called enabling act. In reality, the act would grant Hitler the power to issue laws on his own. A few hours before the vote, SA troops invaded the Reichstag and lined up behind the elected members. The massive appearance of Brownshirts, eager to fight, worked as intended. Only the Social Democrats dared to vote against the act, which was passed with the required majority.





In February 1933, Hermann Göring appointed the SA auxiliary police. The Brownshirts were armed and patrolled side by side with the ordinary policemen.

Hitler himself did not shy away from saying that opponents were to be suppressed with violence, and in the course of February, the opponents were hit by a wave of carefully planned Nazi terror actions. The SA attacked trade union offices and vandalised the homes of prominent left-wing politicians. Socialist election meetings were stormed, speakers and attendants beaten up:

"There can be only one victor: Marxism or the German people", thundered Hitler.

Previously, the Communists had not refused a brisk street fight, but now their corps of young men, *Rotfrontkämpferbund*, maintained a low profile. On the one hand, the Communist leaders thought that the violent attacks were the last gasping breaths of Nazism before the party collapsed, and on the other, they feared that escalating violence would lead to a ban against their party.

Fire triggered Hitler's fury

On 27 February at 9.55 p.m. – six days before the election – the fire alarm sounded at the Berlin fire service. The Reichstag building was on fire. Firemen rushed to the >>>

CONCENTRATION CAMPS EVERYWHERE

In 1933, the first concentration camp opened in Dachau near Munich. Over the next few years, new camps emerged all over Germany. They were to hold all opponents of the regime.

Under the Nazi regime, an extensive network of concentration camps shot up all over Germany. They were to hold the thousands of Socialists that were arrested by the security service in 1933-1934 and also work as an ill-concealed threat to potential critics. Later, gypsies, Jews and homosexuals were also sent for "training" in the camps.

▼ *Concentration camps*

GERMANY

Esterwegen (1933)

Moringen (1933)

Oranienburg (1933)

Columbia (1933)

Lichtenburg (1933)

Bad Sulza (1933)

Flossenburg (1938)

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

NEUENGAMME (1938)

■ *The camp near Hamburg was run with ruthless brutality. Some 50,000 prisoners were made to work or starve to death.*

RAVENSBRÜCK (1939)

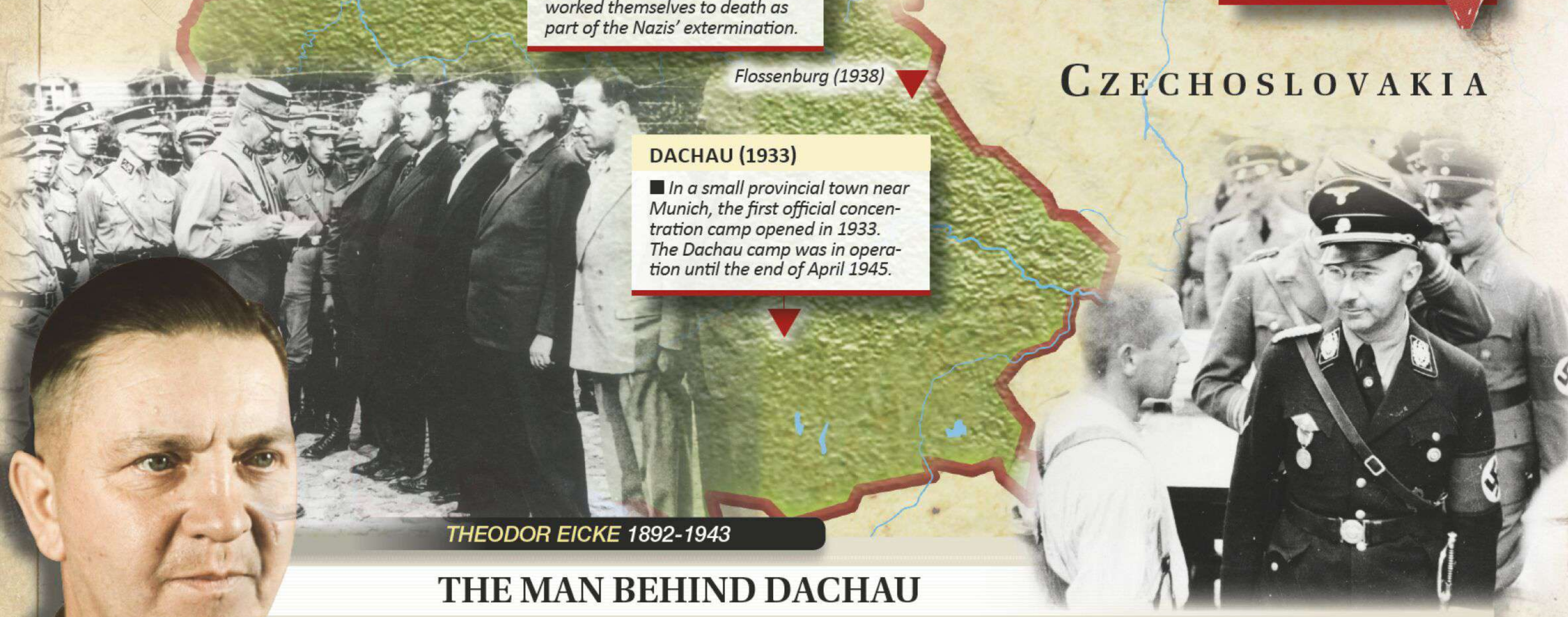
■ *As one of only a few camps, Ravensbrück was mainly for female prisoners. 110,000 prisoners passed through the camp during the war. Only 40,000 survived.*

SACHSENHAUSEN (1936)

■ *Sachsenhausen functioned as a training camp for guards who were later stationed elsewhere. The camp was mainly for political prisoners who were made to clear the streets of Berlin after the Allies' bombing raids.*

SACHSENBURG (1933)

■ *The camp management in Sachsenburg was the first to use small textile triangles to identify the prisoners. E.g. red for political prisoners, pink for homosexuals, yellow for Jews.*



BUCHENWALD (1937)

■ *In spite of its idyllic name (beach forest, eds.), Buchenwald was one of the harshest concentration camps in Nazi Germany. Thousands of Jews, gypsies, war prisoners and homosexuals worked themselves to death as part of the Nazis' extermination.*

DACHAU (1933)

■ *In a small provincial town near Munich, the first official concentration camp opened in 1933. The Dachau camp was in operation until the end of April 1945.*

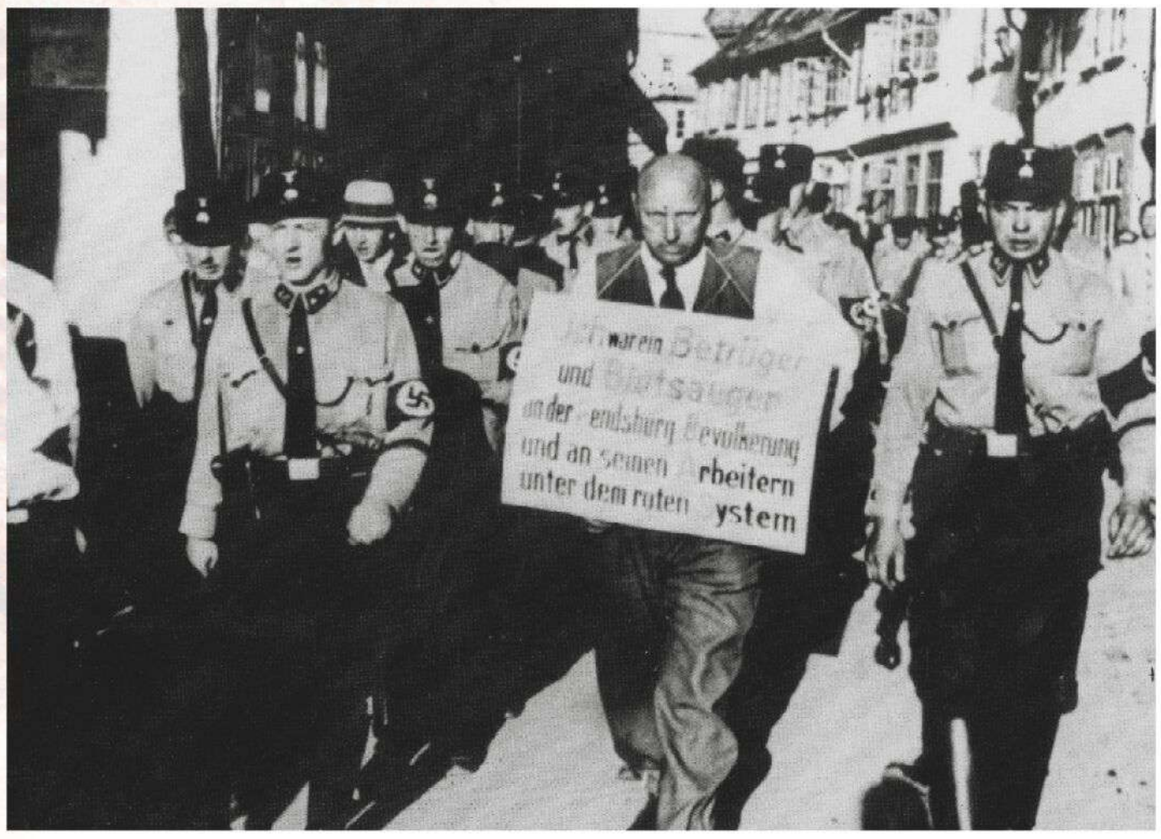
THEODOR EICKE 1892-1943

THE MAN BEHIND DACHAU

■ The SS man Theodor Eicke had a meteoric career as the man who standardised the German concentration camps. He was born in 1892, grew up in a middle-class family and enrolled in the Nazi Party in 1928.

In 1932, Eicke was sentence to two years' imprisonment for planning bomb attacks against Nazi enemies, but managed to escape to Italy. After the seizure of power in 1933, he returned and was appointed camp commandant in Dachau, the first concentration camp. Even within the SS, Theodor Eicke was known as being unusually malicious and full of hatred against anybody who did not share his Nazi ideology. In Dachau, he soon introduced a set of harsh rules and similarly brutal punishments. Eicke's rules were soon copied in all German concentration camps. Theodor Eicke died in a plane crash on the Eastern Front 16 February 1943.

Camp commandant in Dachau – inspector for Germany's death camps – SS General in WWII



Socialists, trade union leaders, Jews and school teachers were driven through the streets.



Winner of the Nobel Peace Price, Carl von Ossietzky (right) was one of the first to be arrested. His swollen face clearly shows the Gestapo's treatment of him.

scene and got the fire under control, but it had triggered Hitler's fury. When the Chancellor reached the smouldering building, he exploded in anger: "No more mercy. Anyone standing in our way will be slaughtered", the Chancellor thundered to the present party colleagues and journalists.

On that evening, the police arrested the 24-year-old Dutch Communist Marinus van der Lubbe at the scene of crime and charged him with arson. Hermann Göring stated that the fire was the start of a carefully planned Communist revolt, and the next day, the Prussian press service reported that the Reichstag fire was "the most horrible act of terror committed by Communists in Germany to date".

100,000
Communists, Social Democrats and trade union people were arrested by the SA in 1933 alone.

"A SIGN FROM HEAVEN"

Later, Hitler called the fire a sign from heaven, and indeed, the attack came at a very convenient time for the Nazi Party. The next day, Hitler obtained approval of the so-called Reichstag fire order, which instantly repealed the freedom of press, the freedom of association and the freedom of speech in Germany. Also, the police were given permission to search people and residences without a court order. Hours later, the police and the SA auxiliary troops stormed Communist party offices and private homes and arrested leading opposition figures.

The Nazi leaders presented the emergency laws and arrests in grandiose propaganda speeches about "the Bolshevist threat against the fatherland", and the whole country soon erupted in a hunt for anything that resembled Communism. Although it was not really possible for the party to canvass and all leading figures were under arrest or had fled, the Communists nevertheless won the support of 12.3 per cent of the approx. 45 million voters in the election on 6 March. The Nazis won their highest number of votes ever. 43.9 per cent – more than 17 million Germans – voted for the party on voting list one.

With their coalition partners, the Nationalists, the Nazi Party now controlled 51.9 per cent of the votes. Hitler, however, wanted to amend Germany's constitution, which would grant him absolute power, and the coalition of Nazis and Nationalists were still far from the two thirds of the votes required for a constitutional amendment. In March 1933, Hitler's power was far from consolidated.

SOCIALISTS DRANK URINE

In the weeks after the election, the SA and the SS hoisted swastika flags over all public buildings. Under the fluttering swastika flag, the Brownshirts intensified their terror, backed by the Gestapo, the newly-created secret police. Often, office workers in the Gestapo would identify potential enemies, and the SA would set to work. Punishment ranged from the primitive kind, like in Cologne, where local Nazis forced a Social Democratic member of the Reichstag to drink oil and urine, to the more brutal kind, like in Braunschweig, where a local Social Democratic member of the city council was beaten to death when he refused to resign from his post. In Bavaria, the number of so-called political arrests soared, and the tightly-packed state prisons could find no more room for prisoners. On 20 March 1933, SS leader Heinrich Himmler therefore announced the opening of the country's first concentration camp near the town of Dachau outside Munich. A few days later, the inhabitants of the small German town saw the first trucks driving Communists, Social Democrats and trade union leaders towards the camp.

Soon, more concentration camps opened all over Germany, and the hard life in the new correction facilities was portrayed in newspapers all over the country. There was to be no doubt about the fate awaiting opponents of the national Nazi revolution.

PRIEST HELPS HITLER SECURE POWER

While the Brownshirts crushed all opposition, Hitler appeared before the Reichstag, which, following the fire, assembled in the Kroll Opera in Berlin. Hitler insisted that he wanted to protect Germany at any cost.

MEANWHILE IN THE SOVIET UNION

STALIN PURGED MILLIONS

As Hitler was tightening his grip on Germany, Josef Stalin started a massive purge in the Soviet Union. The increasingly paranoid dictator feared possible threats against his power, and from 1936 to 1938, a large number of prominent Communists and officers were charged with treason. Accusations were forced out under torture and backed up by false evidence. Then, the "traitors" were sentenced to death and subsequently executed in large, public show trials.

Millions of ordinary Soviet citizens were killed in the feared Gulag work camps. According to official Soviet figures, security forces killed 681,692 people during the purge, known as The Great Terror. The figure may have been much higher.



The Nazi leader called on the Reichstag to pass his so-called enabling act – if not, the country would fall into the hands of the Socialists. The act would give Hitler the power to pass provisional laws, bypassing the President and the Reichstag, and in reality give Hitler dictatorial powers. On the face of it, Hitler's dream appeared impossible. Surrender of power from the Reichstag to the Chancellor would be a clear violation of the German constitution, which had to be passed with a two-third majority of all votes. The Communist Party had been banned from voting after the fire in the Reichstag, the Social Democrats would never vote in favour of an enabling act, and this left Zentrum, the Catholic centre party, to give Hitler his majority. The party leader – priest Ludwig Kaas – feared for the survival of the church under Nazi rule and was very sceptical of Hitler. At numerous meetings, the Chancellor therefore emphasised that the church was a historical institution in Germany, the foundation of the family and middle class, and that it would be a central part of a future Nazi Reich. He assured Ludwig Kaas that the Nazi Party was a necessary bulwark against the godless Communists.

His assurances worked as intended, and in the certainty that Zentrum would grant Hitler a majority, the Chancellor could look forward to the Reichstag assembly in confidence.

"The former Prime Minister ended his life at the bottom of a river. His body was sewn into a sack."

Voted with cyanide in the pocket

The vote was set for 23 March, and on that day, broad-shouldered SA men surrounded the Kroll Opera. Anyone trying to get in had to get past the agitated group of Brownshirts outside. Inside, the atmosphere was just as threatening:

"The Opera swarmed with armed men from the SA and the SS... Once us Social Democrats had sat down, the men placed themselves in a half-circle against the wall behind us", said Social Democrat Wilhelm Hoegner when describing the threatening atmosphere. Before the vote, Otto Wels, leader of the Social Democrats, mounted the platform and, to the scornful laughter of the Nazis, he spoke out against the act in strong terms. Several prominent Social Democrats had already been killed by the Nazis, and in his breast pocket, Otto Wels had a cyanide capsule. The opposition leader would rather take his own life than be arrested, tortured and killed. After Wels, Adolf Hitler took the floor:

"You are convinced", he roared, cheered on by the listeners, "that your influence will grow again. That will never happen!"

Earlier that day, the Chancellor had threatened that there would be a bloodbath if the enabling act was not passed. He told the members of the Reichstag that the vote was a choice between war and peace. The threats worked. 444 Reichstag members – including all Zentrum delegates – voted for the enabling act. Only the 94 Social Democrats dared to vote against. Hitler had been granted total power.



SA leather belt. The belt was standard equipment of the Brownshirt uniform.

The SA crusched all opposition

To the Nazis, the time had come to crush the Social Democrats and trade unions as effectively as the Communists.

On 2 May 1933, SA troops stormed the trade unions that had been sympathetic toward the Social Democrats, took over their newspapers and sent the leaders to concentration camps. Days later, all other trade unions voluntarily submitted to the Nazi Party. In less than a week, the former powerful German trade union movement had ceased to exist, and all workers and employers were to be members of the Nazi Deutsche Arbeitsfront.

Just one month later, the Social Democratic Party was declared illegal, and leading Social Democrats were arrested. Party leader Otto Wels managed to escape and died in exile in Paris in 1939. Not all were so lucky. In Berlin, storm troopers were unexpectedly met with resistance from Social Democrats who were hiding in a house in Köpenick, a suburb.

TECHNICAL..... CULTURE..... ECONOMY..... DAILY LIFE.....



No one was safe

■ In 1933, Interior Minister Hermann Göring established the Nazis' secret police – the Gestapo. The newly-established corps was given the task of tracking down every enemy of Nazism. The secret police force was not subject to Germany's normal laws and could, in Hitler's own words "use all means, even if they were not in agreement with current law, as long as they served his interests". So-called special courts, which chose their own evidence, were in charge of judging enemies of the regime. At least 12,000 Germans were sent to their death by the courts.

“The Nazi movement will exist for 1,000 years”



In 1933, the Nazis had three million men who were ready for battle, and SA leader Ernst Röhm aired his dreams about making the German army part of the Brownshirts and being in complete control.

In retaliation, the SA rounded up 500 Social Democrats, who were arrested, beaten and tortured for several days. 91 people died in the incident, which the newspapers called the Köpenick Week of Blood.

Violence escalated all over Germany, led by the Brownshirts whose membership passed a massive two million in the summer of 1933. In the Land of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, the former Social Democratic Prime Minister Johannes Stelling ended his life at the bottom of a river, sewn into a sack and weighed down by stones. His body was later retrieved along with those of 12 other Social Democrats. Collaboration partners from Zentrum and coalition partners from the Nationalists were also hit by an SA and SS terror campaign. During the summer, the parties dissolved themselves, and the one-party state was a reality. Only Reich President von Hindenburg survived the political purge, but the 85-year-old former German commander no longer had any influence. He was purely ornamental.

Fear hit Germany

Hitler’s unification not only hit the political system. All over the country, Nazis were placed in central positions, and associations and interest groups were dissolved or placed under the Party’s control. Teachers had to join the Nationalist Socialist Teachers’ League, and doctors were to pay their future subscription to the Nationalist Socialist Physicians’ League.

A new act also made it possible to fire public employees of a non-Aryan background or with an unsuitable past as politically active. As a result, hundreds of thousands of public employees now joined the Nazi Party for fear of losing their jobs or ending up in prison. The risk was real, and to the ordinary German, it was a simple and easy choice – rather join Hitler than become yet another one of his victims.

The Nazification of the society served several purposes: It became more difficult for rebellious citizens to meet and make plans against the regime, and easier for the Nazis to indoctrinate the people. At the end of 1933, all of Germany was in the hands of the Nazis. There was only one unresolved problem: The millions of Brownshirts in the SA, controlled by Ernst Röhm. The storm troopers had become unpleasantly powerful and posed the biggest threat against Hitler’s desire for absolute power.

Röhm thought that Hitler was failing the Nazis’ Socialist roots in his zeal to win the support of big industry and the army. Spring brought rumours of a counter-revolution headed by Röhm. Also, the Germans had had enough of the storm troopers, which had now become a problem – and turned Röhm into a rival. On 30 June 1934, Hitler initiated his most risky plan so far. Aided by the Gestapo, the army and his personal bodyguard, the time had come for a showdown with the former comrades-in-arms. ■

FOCUS

THE NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES

The Night of the Long Knives became a brutal confrontation between old friends and enemies. Within two bloody days and nights, Hitler defeated the SA leaders, had his closest friend, Ernst Röhm, killed and settled old scores. The following eight pages provide an intense account of the dramatic hours in 1934 when Hitler assumed total power.



1934





Ernst Röhm is Adolf Hitler's closest friend and confidant. The SA leader is one of the few persons to address the Führer informally.

FOCUS

When Ernst Röhm enters the room on 18 April 1934, everybody instantly falls silent. The thickset and overweight Nazi leader has called a press conference for foreign reporters and diplomats in the Propaganda Ministry's buildings in Berlin. The Machine Gun King, as the German press has nicknamed him, decisively walks on to the swastika-decorated platform and prepares to deliver his aggressive speech.

The old soldier has a scar running down his animal-like face and a plastic nose from the fights he has been in. He carries his wounds with pride – like medals etched into his skin. As always, he is dressed in the brown SA uniform with a single swastika band around his arm.

"I want to tell you about Sturmabteilung", Röhm begins. The voice is hard and firm.

Sturmabteilung, better known as the SA or the Brownshirts, are the Nazis' combat troops; a paramilitary organisation with Röhm as the chief of staff. The often anarchistic and violent movement has been part of the Nazi Party since the beginning 13 years ago. From being a small group of dissatisfied World War I veterans, the SA has grown to be a huge corps with millions of men. A brutal, armed and influential force, which has been decisive in bringing Hitler to power the year before.

"The SA is the Germanic revolution", Röhm trumpets halfway through his speech. The attendants are bored – coughing and fidgeting on their chairs. They know that Hitler and Röhm are close – and have heard the SA leader's propaganda speeches before. But then comes the shock.

Röhm begins to criticise right-wing elements in the country's leadership. He talks about enemies from within, who threaten Nazism. Röhm raises his voice, nearly shouting:

"The SA corps is the true Nazi revolution!"

Scattered applause is heard from a few SA members at the back of the room. The reporters eagerly begin to take notes. The other attendants are silent and astonished. Over and over again, the regime has thundered that Hitler and the Party are the leaders of the Nazi revolution. Has Röhm done the unthinkable and challenged his Führer?

Army decides to support Hitler

When Hitler hears about the press conference, he is in no way surprised. Trusted employees have told the Führer that Röhm, in limited circles, talks about the treacherous Hitler, who is destroying the Nazi revolution. Rumour has it that the SA leader plans to send the Führer "on a long holiday".

In general, the SA and its leadership continues to act loyally toward Hitler, but it was only the year before that the Führer was appointed Chancellor, and the balance of power still appears fragile. It is essential to Hitler to gain full control of all armed or military groups in Germany. His personal bodyguards, the SS, are loyal to the Führer, and the secret police, the Gestapo, are also under Hitler's control. However, the SA troops are under Ernst Röhm's brutal control, while the army remains neutral in the conflict and has, in principle, sworn allegiance to the ageing President, Paul von Hindenburg. During May, Hitler secretly wins the support of the army's officer corps, which fears the growing strength of the Brownshirts. At the same time, the Gestapo begins to prepare documents to show that the SA leadership is preparing a conspiracy against Hitler, the army and Hindenburg.

The SA corps sent on leave

On Friday night, 29 June 1934, Hitler is in a hotel room in Bad Godesberg – a Bonn suburb. The Führer has gathered a number of key advisors, including Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, and is now restlessly pacing the patio. The heavy summer rain is drumming against the window, and in the distance, a faint thunder is heard. Hitler is contemplating a plan, which he has been thinking about over the past months. Röhm needs to be removed in a swift action, and the SA must be placed under his own SS corps.

The SA corps has been sent on leave for the entire month of July. In Berlin, Goebbels has doubled the number of SS guards on patrol and throughout the country, the SS, the Gestapo and key persons in the army are on standby. In the small town Bad Wiessee near Munich, Röhm and the rest of the SA leadership have taken lodgings in a pension where they think that Hitler will hold a group meeting the following day. Everything has been planned in detail. The Führer just needs to make the final decision. Yet, to Goebbels' annoyance, Hitler keeps pacing without saying a word.

It is a difficult decision for the Führer. Should he sacrifice his old friend Röhm? The SA leader has stood by Hitler's side since the early years and participated in Hitler's failed putsch in Munich in 1923. During the most severe crises, Röhm has been a very important ally. At the same time, the Führer despises Ernst Röhm's homosexual excesses



Ernst Röhm gives his fateful speech on 18 April 1934. Two months later, the SA leader is killed.



In 1933, some of the SA men in Berlin are given guns. The arming takes place on Hitler's order.

and the wild sex orgies in the SA top. At 12.30 a.m., Hitler is told that the SA is demonstrating in the streets of Munich and that they will take the unrest to Berlin the next morning.

To the Führer, this is a sign of an imminent coup. Hitler is outraged and keeps pacing, cursing the SA leaders, calling them "poison to Germany" and traitors. His whole body is shaking as he spits out his decision: The high treason must be stopped at all costs.

"We must go to Munich and after that to Bad Wiessee", he says. Hitler's driver and bodyguard quickly leave the room and drive the procession of cars out. The Führer has made his decision. Friday night has become Saturday 30 June when the procession of black Mercedes cars race into the Hangerlar airport in Bonn. Water is spraying from puddles under the wheels, the rain keeps falling in the dark night, but the landing strip is illuminated. The very moment the driver stops the car, Hitler jumps out and walks straight to his plane. As always, his pilot greets him politely, but this time, there is no reply. Hitler sits down next to the pilot in the space where he prefers to sit when flying.

CHIEF OF POLICE THE FIRST VICTIM

The three propellers on the grey Junker plane begin to rotate, and shortly after, the machine takes off with a light tremble. It breaks through the dark clouds and turns lightly as the pilot sets the course for Munich. As they glide through the air, the pilot informs about the towns and cities that pass underneath them. Hitler still does not say a word. He sits bent forward, staring into space. No one can see what is going on behind the thin-lipped face.

At 4 o'clock in the morning, the plane lands in the Oberwiesenfeld airport near Munich. Soldiers wearing helmets stand at attention under the cement-coloured sky. They have been waiting for an hour for the Führer to arrive. Hitler and his entourage drive directly to the centre, escorted by guards dressed in black and with loaded weapons and a truck with armed soldiers.

An advisor informs Hitler that SA men have ravaged the streets all night. The drunken thugs have finally calmed down, and peace has returned to Munich. Hitler flies into a temper. It is precisely that kind of uncontrolled anarchy that makes him furious – the SA rebellion must be stopped. The procession heads directly to the Interior Ministry's offices where the highest-ranking SA leader of Munich, the city's chief of police,

"An advisor informs Hitler that SA men have ravaged the streets all night. The drunken thugs have finally calmed down, and peace has returned to Munich."

In 1934, the millions of armed storm troopers pose a real threat to Hitler's power.

FOCUS

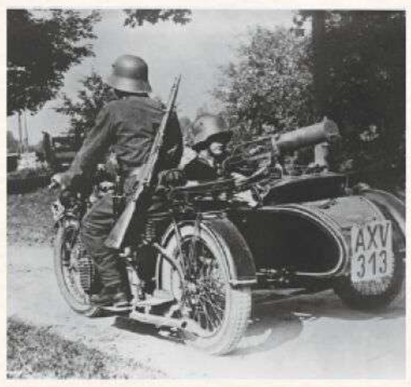
Four services are fighting for power:

SA (Sturmabteilung) The Brownshirts was the largest corps in Germany. Four miliion men were ready to follow Ernst Röhm's orders.

SS (Schutzstaffel) Hitler's personal bodyguards counted 200,000 young National Socialists.

Gestapo The newly-established secret police was headed by Heinrich Himmler and loyal to Hitler.

Army (Reichswehr) Had 100,000 soldiers officially. The real number was higher. The army felt threatened by the SA.



In spite of the ban of the Treaty of Versailles, the army had started its rearmament.



The Iron Cross is the highest German military order. Hitler has one after his efforts in World War I.

August Schneidhuber, is already being held under arrest. Trembling with rage, Hitler almost leaps out of the car, walks directly through the badly lit corridors and up on the third floor where he finds Schneidhuber. The moment the Führer stands in front of the SA leader, he explodes in a hysterical fit of anger. He takes hold of Schneidhuber and rips off war medals and Nazi badges of the 47-year-old SA leader's uniform, while cursing Schneidhuber as a traitor who has lost control over his men.

The highly decorated military hero is shocked at Hitler's unexpected scolding and reacts with fury:

"Keep your dirty fingers off me", he shouts right into Hitler's face.

"Lock him up", the Führer orders, and with these words, the astounded chief of police is dragged away. Schneidhuber is the first of a number of former allies whose lives will change radically within the next days. Outside, the June sun has risen. Ahead await the events that will decide the balance of power in the Nazi Party and the future of Germany. Hitler and Goebbels rush on, followed by bodyguards and advisors. The Führer's car takes the lead, and the men head toward Bad Wiessee.

The SS storms Röhm's hotel

A calmness has fallen on the Tegern Lake, and the quiet water looks beautiful behind the Hanselbauer Pension. Undulating hills, trickling mountain springs and wooden houses nestle in the area.

The idyllic rooms are occupied by Brown-shirts, still drunk and sleeping it off. The day before – with Röhm taking the lead – they engaged in the sort of decadent festivities that Hitler despises. Before Röhm collapsed, he made sure to arrange a special banquet at 11.30 a.m., when Hitler will appear – as always with a special vegetarian menu in honour of the Führer. Röhm's personal guards left the place in a closed truck when the last guests went to bed earlier that night, and now, shortly before 7 o'clock, everything is calm in the hotel rooms.

Consequently, no one hears or sees the personnel carriers that drive up in front of the main entrance. Armed SS men dressed in black jump out. The first group sneaks up to the hotel without saying a word. The next runs across the moss in the garden, which dampens their steps. Soon the building is surrounded. The SS men have quickly ensured that no one can leave the hotel. Shortly after, Hitler's procession drives into the open space in front of Hanselbauer Pension. It is not yet 7 o'clock.

Hitler stands at the front door, a gun in his hand, and then, an inferno breaks out. The door is kicked in, and SS soldiers storm up the stairs and down the narrow corridors. Shouting can be heard, and maids are pushed aside. Hitler's men meet no resistance. They barge in to the rooms, drag snoring, red-eyed SA men out of their beds and take them away, heavy-handedly, some of them still half-naked. Surrounded by loyal bodyguards, Hitler marches up in front of Ernst Röhm's room. Suddenly, the corridors fall quiet. An officer dressed in plain clothes steps forward and knocks on the door. No answer. Then, Hitler knocks too. Röhm wakes up at the muffled banging on the door. He stumbles out of bed, opens the door with sleepy eyes – and there, standing in front of him is Adolf Hitler, surrounded by SS men with guns. "Are you here already?" asks Röhm open-mouthed, addressing Hitler informally.

Röhm is confused – he knows that Hitler is to meet him today, but not now and not like this. Hitler looks him at coldly, directly in the eyes. He points a gun at his old friend, steps into the room and starts shouting accusations against him about high treason. Röhm stands in the room, stripped to the waist, his face red and swollen from lack of sleep. First, he is paralysed. Then, he protests.

"Ernst", Hitler interrupts his former friend. "You are under arrest".

Elsewhere in the hotel, the last SA men are dragged out of their rooms and taken away. One of the leaders, Edmund Heines from Breslau, is found in his bed with his male driver, an SA man. The reaction is swift: Heines gets knocked over.

"I haven't done anything", the SA leader shouts. "Help me". But no one helps Edmund Heines. He is shot there and then, as the first victim in Hitler's purge. At the same time, Röhm is taken to the waiting cars, which go back to Munich shortly after. Here, he is put in a cell in the Stadelheim prison.

The Gestapo hands out death lists

The action, which will be known as the Night of the Long Knives, has started. Röhm is under control, and now Hitler is moving on. Platform trucks full of armed men, loyal to Hitler, secures the perimeter the SA headquarters in Munich, known as the Brown House, where a number of Brownshirts are present. None of them must leave the building. A train arrives at the Munich railway station, carrying a group of high-ranking SA men. They are on their way to the planned banquet, and now, unsuspectingly, step out on the platform, still sleepy after the night's train journey. They are met by armed SS men who search the SA leaders and transport them to cells in the Stadelheim prison.

At 10 o'clock, Hitler appears in the Party headquarters in Munich. He get a telephone and says one single word: "Hummingbird". At the other end of the line in Berlin is Hermann Göring. Hearing the word spoken by the Führer, the former head of the Gestapo knows exactly what to do. Hours of secret monitoring and countless pieces of information from informants have enabled the secret police to draw up a list of mortal enemies of the regime. Now, Hitler has given the green light to the planned purge – the time has come to settle old scores.

In Berlin, the impatient Reinhard Heydrich, second in command of the SS, is happy to receive the order. With unflagging energy, Heydrich has been at the forefront preparing the death lists. Now, through the Gestapo's special teleprinter network, he sends messages to his waiting killers all over Germany. Classified, sealed envelopes are torn open, and the names in the documents scanned. The hunt can begin. Across the country,

death patrols head out in groups of two or three. With brutal efficiency they find their victims, from Munich in the south to Hamburg in the north.

At the Party office, Hitler is continually informed about the executions. At his side is Hitler's deputy, Rudolf Hess, and with every new order to kill received, they tick off the list that Hitler is holding in his hand. Name after name is coolly recorded, until a familiar name is heard in the room:

"Schneidhuber".

Hess goes pale, throws back his head and mumbles incomprehensibly. The chief of police and SA leader in Munich, Schneidhuber, is Hess' old friend. Worried, Hess steps up close to Hitler and whispers a few words into his ear. But it was only a few hours ago that Schneidhuber was cursing Hitler when being arrested, and Hitler shakes his head dismissively. Schneidhuber is ticked off on the list, and Hitler's long-time driver and personal bodyguard, Sepp Dietrich, makes his way to the Stadelheim prison. Hitler has nominated him as executioner.

SCHNEIDHUBER IS KILLED

Dietrich is surprised. The round-headed man with the Hitler-like moustache has just stepped into the Stadelheim prison when a high-ranking official cuts off his way. The man is visibly afraid, his lips are quivering and his legs shaking uncontrollably, but the official refuses to let Dietrich through to the prisoners without a permit. Furious, Dietrich grabs hold of the nearest telephone and hands the receiver to the official. At the other end, the Führer orders the official to mind his own business. "My permission is enough to execute the prisoners", the Führer assures him.

Dietrich walks into the corridor and passes the cells, where the SA leaders – his former friends – are kept behind bars. At each door, he makes a short stop and delivers his message: "The Führer has sentenced you to death", he says curtly, followed by a powerful "Heil Hitler!".

The prisoners do not understand what is going on. Most of them are convinced that they have fallen victim of a military coup, others think that their arrest is a misunderstanding.

When Dietrich gets to Schneidhuber in cell 504, the chief of police jumps up. He pushes against the bars, pleading: "Comrade Sepp. This is madness. We are innocent". But the executioner has already delivered his message and walks on to the next cell, repeating his death sentence:

"The Führer has sentenced you to death. Heil Hitler!"

The minute after, Schneidhuber is taken out of his cell. The guards escort him to the yard where six riflemen are waiting. From cell 474, Röhm can hear shouting from the yard: "On the Führer's order: Ready, aim, fire!" The echo of rifle shots is heard a moment later.

MASS MURDER AT CADET SCHOOL

In Berlin, *Operation Hummingbird* is carried out with merciless precision. First, SS men surround the SA headquarters in Berlin and take it without meeting any resistance. A few minutes later, Hermann Göring arrives. He hurries through the building, pointing out several men: "Arrest him", Göring shouts. "And him! Arrest him! And him!"

In total, Göring sends 150 SA leaders behind bars. The prisoners are taken to a cadet school southeast of Berlin, where the guards put them in a room in the cellar. Shortly after, four names are called out. The men are taken to the school's courtyard and put in front of a red brick wall. A guard tears open the prisoners' shirts, and on their naked chests, he quickly draws a circle with coal around their left nipple.

From a window in the cellar, the rest of the prisoners can follow the events. Eight hand-picked SS men stand five metres from the prisoners. They aim their rifles, and shortly after, loud shots can be heard. The execution is exceptionally bloody. Lumps of flesh are torn off and stick to the wall in bloody spots. Then, the next four names are called out. The executions continue, and the wall turns redder and redder until it is covered in blood and



In 1934, Hitler and Röhm are the most powerful men in Germany. In future, there will only be room for one of them.

FOCUS



Leading SA men spend the night at the idyllic pension Hanselbauer outside Munich.

ERNST RÖHM'S FINAL HOURS:

30 June, midnight
After a long drinking bout, the SA leader goes to bed in his room.

30 June, morning
Just before 7 o'clock, a furious Adolf Hitler storms Ernst Röhm's room. The SA leader is escorted away by SS troops. He never sees Hitler again.

2 July, morning
The SS men Theodor Eicke and Hans Lippert go to see Röhm in the Stadelheim prison in Munich. They give the SA leader a gun and the option of shooting himself.

2 July, morning
Ten minutes later, Eicke and Lippert return. Röhm has refused to take his own life. The two men get out their guns and kill the SA leader in his prison cell.

bits of flesh. The many executions make the riflemen feel so bad that the SS has to call in a new team of executioners. During the entire incident, the prisoners are very confused. Several of them do not know why they have been sentenced to death. Some of them are convinced that they have fallen victim of a conspiracy against the Führer and exclaim a "Heil Hitler" the second before they are killed.

In the capital, life continues as usual. The Berliners unsuspectingly enjoy the clear, 30 degree hot summer's day. The Nazi flags hang idle in the light breeze, and couples walk hand in hand and enjoy their cups of coffee in the cafés near Unter den Linden. A few hundred metres away, in Leipziger Strasse, the air is ripe with tension. Here, from his control centre, Hermann Göring is controlling the action. Enthusiastic shouting and loud laughter can be heard from his office when Göring and his employees receive news about the operation. They drink cold beer and eat sandwiches. To Göring, the Night of the Long Knives is not only a professional purge. It is also a personal rampage of revenge.

GÖRING TAKES REVENGE

Locked up in the cadet school prison is, among others, Captain Gehrt, whom Göring once decorated personally for his courage. The captain knows that he will soon be taken to the wall and executed like his friends. His is terrified when a guard steps into the cell and orders Gehrt to step out. And he is similarly relieved then the guard gives his order, which comes from Göring himself:

"Go home", Gehrt is told. "Put on your uniform and all your medals. You will then be taken to stand before Prime Minister Göring".

Hoping that his old friendship with the Nazi leader will save him, Gehrt is first escorted home to change clothes, and immediately after driven to Leipziger Strasse and taken to Göring's office. Yet, if Gehrt has expected any kind of mercy when meeting Hitler's right hand, the captain is undeceived the moment he steps into the room.

"You filthy bastard", shouts an evidently furious Göring, as he storms toward the dumbstruck captain. Göring is furious about Gehrt's betrayal, and with a violent jerk, he tears the medals off the captain's uniform, exclaiming:

"I wanted to do you myself! Take him away", Göring orders and turns away. Gehrt is escorted back to the cadet school outside Berlin, where executions are still being performed. One hour later, his name is called out again by a guard. The captain, who is clearly shaken, refuses to come out of his cell and screams in panic; but the guards tie his hands behind his back and drag him to the blood-soiled wall. A few seconds later, Gehrt is dead.

VON PAPEN ESCAPES DEATH

While on paper, the action is a purge of SA leaders, the names on the death list are not only members of the Brownshirts. Anyone threatening Hitler's power is sought out by the hit squads. Erich Klausener – a supporter of the former Chancellor von Papen and one of the strongest critics of Hitler – is paid a visit by two SS men in his office. They tell him that he is under arrest. Without protest, Klausener gets up to go with them. He only takes two steps. Then, one of the men raises his gun and fires a single shot. Klausener falls down, hit in the face. As the blood slowly seeps out on the floor, his killers place the gun in the critic's hand and leave the office calmly. Von Papen himself, who is really one of the greatest threats against Hitler, survives the purge. His friendship with President von Hindenburg, who is still popular, makes Hitler spare the ex-Chancellor's life. The Führer still fears the President who enjoys great respect among military officers.

NEWSPAPER EDITOR BLEEDS TO DEATH

Gregor Strasser, a critical newspaper editor, also becomes a victim in the Night of the Long Knives. The editor is eating lunch with his family when the doorbell sounds. Without introducing themselves, five men step into the house. One of them simply says "Gestapo", and before Strasser can say goodbye to his family, he is taken to a waiting car and driven to a nearby prison. Strasser has only spent a few minutes in his cell, when he sees the barrel of a pistol pointed at him through the bars. Seconds later, a shower of bullets hits the editor. One of them rips open an artery. Mortally wounded, Strasser is left on the cell floor to bleed to death.

In a house near Potsdam, the former Chancellor, Kurt von Schleicher, is checking accounts. Schleicher, who tried to prevent Hitler from becoming Chancellor, seems absorbed in his work; his wife is sitting in an armchair, knitting. A persistent ringing of the doorbell breaks the calm. The housekeeper opens the door, and five men, dressed in long raincoats in the summer heat, step in. The men push past the housekeeper. A moment later, they burst into Schleicher's study and stand face to face with the former Chancellor.

"Are you General von Schleicher?"

"Yes", he replies.

As soon as they hear the reply, the men begin to shoot, and the housekeeper flees into the garden, screaming. One minute later, when the SS people drive away, both von Schleicher and his wife lie dead on the floor.

73-year-old Gustav von Kahr ends his life even more brutally. 11 years earlier – in 1923 – he betrayed Hitler in the failed Beer Hall Putsch, and he was the key witness in the subsequent trial. Now, it is time for revenge. Unknown men drag von Kahr away, only dressed in his bathrobe. The body is found in a swamp near Dachau, beaten and chopped up with an axe.

Music critic Wilhelm Eduard Schmidt from Munich also becomes a victim on that day. His wife opens the door, surprised that four men want to talk to her husband. They do not look like their other friends, who are musicians and journalists. The couple's three children gather nervously around the mother, as the men step into the hallway. They can hear Schmidt playing the cello next door. He stops and comes out, smiling, to see who has come to visit. The men take him with them without explanation. A few days later, Mrs Schmidt receives a coffin with her husband's body. The music critic has been mistaken for another man.

HITLER AFFECTED BY THE PURGE

The day is coming to an end, and the setting sun swathes the sky in a soft play of red hues. Hitler is in his plane, heading for Berlin. The propaganda machine is working at full speed, and the national

press is full of stories about the quashing of an attempted coup by the SA and former allies. Although the Führer has killed off a large number of leaders since the morning, he still fears an uncontrolled rebellion from the SA mob. Before he left Munich, Hitler secured the support of the common SA troops in Munich. Standing in front of them, their heads bowed, he has praised them for having manned the frontlines bravely and proudly, while their corrupt leaders have spent their energy on champagne and wild orgies. He has demanded unconditional loyalty, and it is a great relief to him that they all exclaim a resounding "Heil Hitler".

When Hitler lands in the Tempelhof airport in Berlin, the Nazi leader, who is normally tireless, looks like an old man. He is pale, unshaven and dressed in dark clothes. Slowly, the Führer drags himself out of the plane. On the landing ground, Hermann Göring and the SS leader Heinrich Himmler are waiting. Himmler pulls a crumpled list out of his sleeve. It contains the names of those who have been executed. Hitler begins to read the list. He is silent. Suddenly, a shout breaks the silence. From the top of the hangar, a flight mechanic shouts a single "Bravo, Adolf". Seconds later, crew members and the other mechanics cheer loudly.

The purge continues for days

On the Sunday, Hitler is hosting a tea party in the Chancellor's garden in Berlin. Ministers and army representatives gather in groups and talk, surrounded by uniformed waiters who serve luxurious drinks. Laughter and shrieks from Goebbels' playing children resound through the garden. At the same time as the tea party, the last man on the death list is subjected to the Führer's will.

In the Stadelheim prison in Munich, the door to cell 474 opens. Confused and half-naked, Ernst Röhm is handed a gun by his old comrade in arms, Theodor Eicke. It has one bullet, which the SA leader is to use on himself.

"If Adolf wants to kill me", Röhm says defiantly, "let him do the dirty deed himself".

Eicke, the daily leader of the Dachau concen- >>>>>

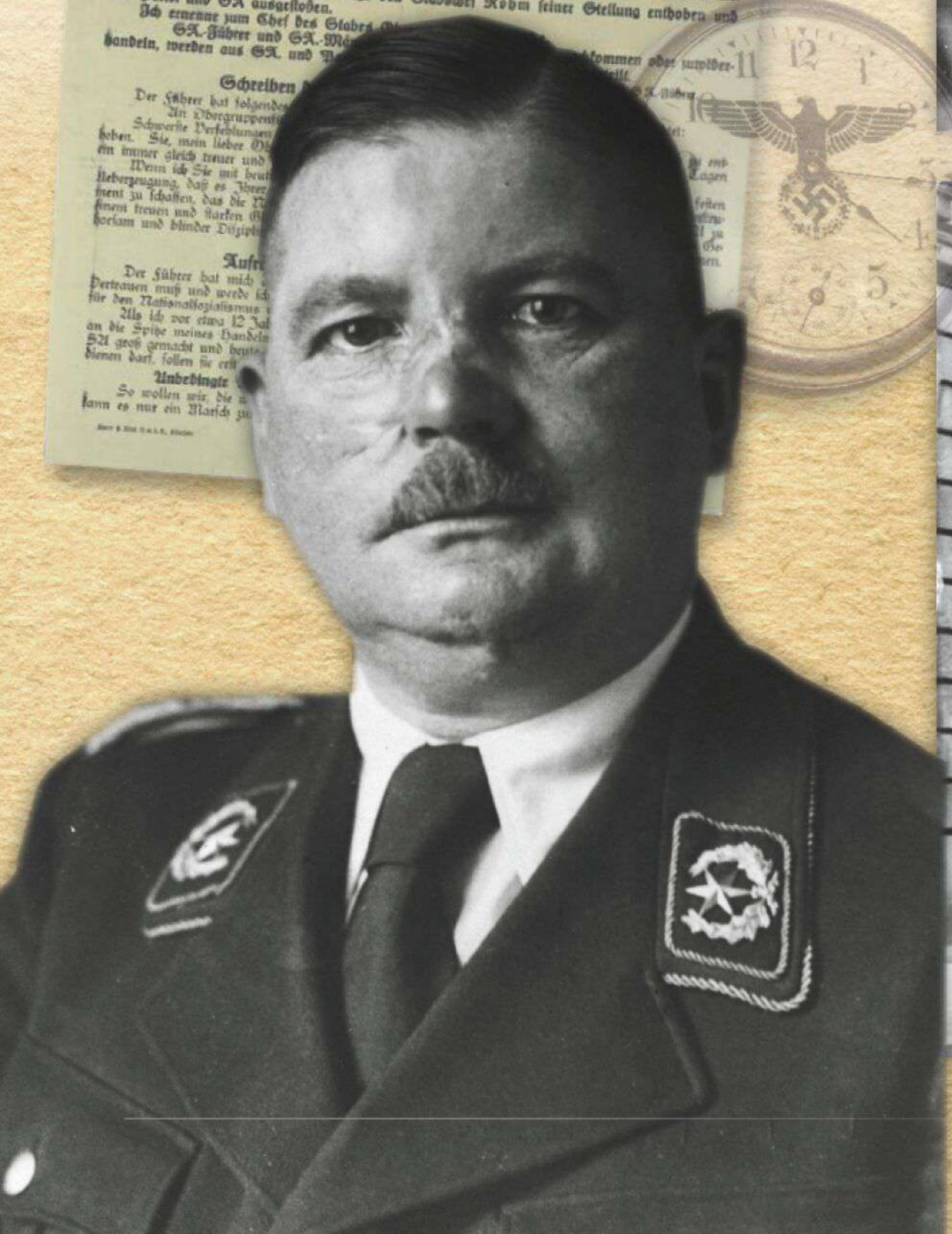
1 Armed soliders from the army surround the SA headquarters in Berlin.

2 The purge takes place in secrecy, and there are no official photographs of the event. Here, SS soldiers have been photographed by chance, on their way to a raid.

3 Large parts of the action are coordinated from the Gestapo headquarters in Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse in Berlin.






Eine Bekanntmachung des Führers

München, 30. Juni. Die Reichspressestelle der NSDAP. teilt folgende Verfügung des Führers mit:

Ich habe mit dem heutigen Tage den Stabschef Röhm seiner Stellung enthoben und aus Partei und SA ausgestoßen.

Ich ernenne zum Chef des Stabes

SA-Führer und SA-Mä

handeln, werden aus SA. und

Schreiben

Der Führer hat folgende

Art Obergruppenf

Schwerste Verfehlungen

heben. Sie, mein lieber Ob

ein immer gleich treuer und

Wenn ich Sie mit heut

Ueberzeugung, daß es Ihne

ment zu schaffen, das die N

einem treuen und starken G

horsam und blinder Disziplin

Aufr

Der Führer hat mich

Vertrauen muß und werde ich

für den Nationalsozialismus

Als ich vor etwa 12 Jah

an die Spitze meines Handel

SA groß gemacht und heute

dienen darf, sollen sie erf

Unbedingte

So wollen wir, die

kann es nur ein Marsch zu



The purge in figures:

200 SA leaders were arrested during the Night of the Long Knives.

61 people were killed according to official sources. 13 more died in shootings. Three committed suicide.

400 died in total. Historians estimate that the real number of victims in the purge is about 400 Germans.

13 members of the Reichstag were among the victims.

1 fomer Chancellor – Kurt von Schleicher – was murdered in the action.

tration camp, leaves the cell. Ten minutes later, he comes back with yet another SS officer. They point their guns at Röhm, who is standing on the floor, naked to the waist. Röhm, who was allowed to address Hitler informally, manages to mumble "Mein Führer, mein Führer" – he is then riddled with bullets. In the tea garden, Hitler is surrounded by elegant women who laugh at his every comment. Hitler is freshly shaven and dressed in a white shirt. A simple swastika band decorates his right arm. The Führer is smiling and almost dancing with joy – a heavy burden has been lifted from his shoulders. The light atmosphere is in stark contrast with the killing that is still taking place. On the orders of local SS leaders, opponents are secretly beaten, tortured and killed all over Germany. The murders now reach far beyond Hitler's carefully prepared death list, as local SS leaders take the opportunity to settle old scores and eliminate old rivals. In some cases, the wives and children of the enemies also disappear. Many of the bodies end up in the German rivers, float around and are found by civilians a few days after.

Hitler talks to Germany

In July, two weeks after the execution of Röhm, Berlin is suffering under a stifling summer heat. Hitler has summoned the Reichstag members to the Kroll Opera, which continues to be the Reichstag meeting place after the Reichstag fire the year before. At 7 p.m., a procession of swastika-decorated ministerial cars drive up in front of the Opera. Several uniformed Nazi leaders get out. Himmler, Göring and Goebbels. Self-confident, they greet each other and make their way into the Opera with firm steps. Hitler arrives shortly after. Closely guarded by bodyguards, he marches into the Opera, determinedly continues through the rows of seats and up on the platform. The atmosphere is tense. 13 Reichstag members are among the victims of the massacre, and nervous glances are thrown at the 13 empty seats in the Opera. Hitler is pale and thin-lipped. With the balconies of the hall as the setting and the orchestra seats filled with the loyal subjects, Hitler raises his fist into the air. This is Hitler's first speech since ordering the mass murders. The Reichs radio is broadcasting his speech all over Germany. The Führer is to explain his deed to the people.

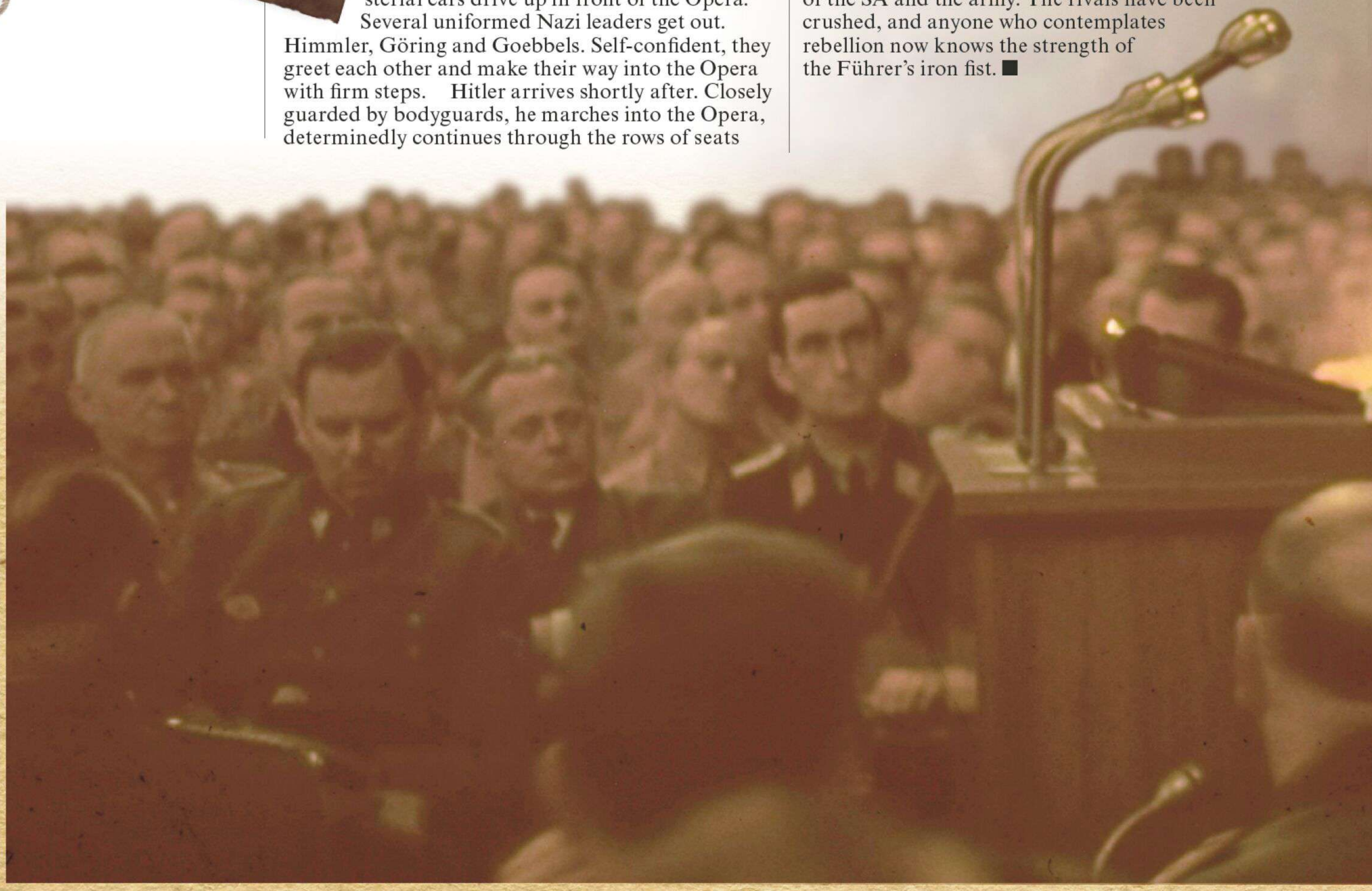
"My explanations will be honest and direct", he proclaims. The words are delivered like punches to the audience. He talks about Röhm:

"The life, which the chief of staff and a certain number of other leaders had started to live, was intolerable", says Hitler. Between the lines is the contempt for the homosexual orgies that Röhm took part in. The Führer's voice is growing hoarse talking about the threats of an SA coup, Ernst Röhm's treason and himself trying to save his beloved Germany:

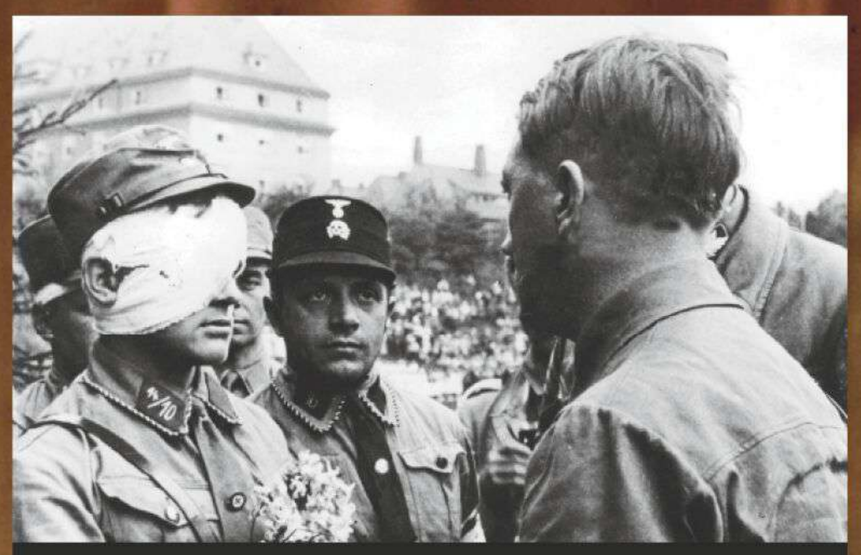
"I ordered the leaders of the guilty ones shot. If you blame me for not going to the courts, I can only say: At that moment I was responsible for the destiny of the German people", he shouts. His voices thunders toward new heights:

"Everybody should know for all eternity that if he raises his hand to strike at the State... his fate will be certain death!"

The attendants rise and reply with an endless, powerful round of applause. The triumph is total. Adolf Hitler has ensured the full and loyal support of the SA and the army. The rivals have been crushed, and anyone who contemplates rebellion now knows the strength of the Führer's iron fist. ■



> “Everybody should know that if he raises his hand to strike at the State... his fate will be certain death”



A wounded SA man swears allegiance to the Führer. The photo is shown in all German papers as a symbol of Hitler’s willingness to forgive the Brownshirts.

Hitler’s oratorical gifts convinced the remaining critics that the purge was necessary.





THE WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS

1933-1939

On 23 September 1933, Adolf Hitler cut the first sod for the country's new Autobahn. The symbolic event marked the beginning of an economic miracle that had never been seen before anywhere in the world. The Nazis did away with the soaring unemployment, raised the pensions, sent people on holiday paid by the State and started a fight against poverty. But it was all done for borrowed money, and six years later, it brought the Third Reich on the verge of bankruptcy.

1933-39





1933 First motorway construction in Germany commences.

1933 Marriage loans remove women from workplaces.

1934 The labour service Reichsarbeitsdienst is set up.

1934 After just one year, unemployment has fallen by more than 2m people.

1938 Hitler approves Ferdinand Porsche's proposed design of a "car to the people" – the Volkswagen.

1939 State expenditure brings Nazi Germany on the verge of bankruptcy.

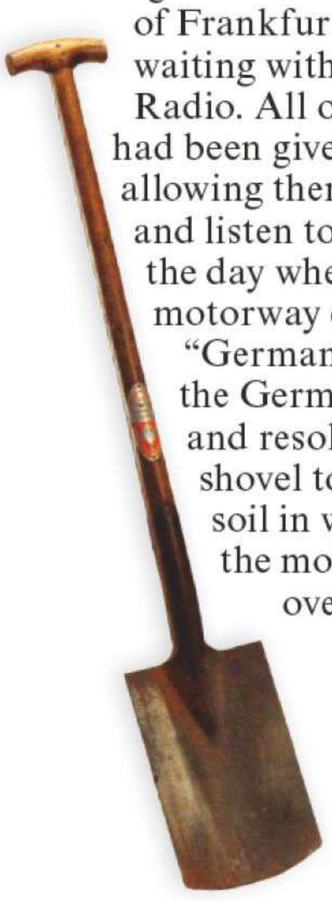
1933 1934 1938 1939

On the morning of 23 September 1933, Fritz Todt was standing in front of the job centre in central Frankfurt. The 42-year-old man, dressed in an SA uniform with a swastika armband and a knife in his belt, held the title of Inspector-General for the German road authorities, and he had come to hire people for Adolf Hitler's ambitious construction project – the establishment of Germany's new motorway network. At the job centre, Fritz Todt was given responsibility for 720 unemployed Germans. In the street, shovels and spades were ready for them.

"Comrades", he started his welcome speech. "It is the will of our Führer that you will never again set foot in these cities. We will go out and build roads".

The unemployed people formed a column, and, spades over their shoulders and Todt at the front, the procession marched to a huge construction site on the outskirts of Frankfurt. Here, Adolf Hitler was waiting with reporters from the State Radio. All over the country, people had been given time off at 10.45 a.m., allowing them to sit by their radios and listen to the transmission from the day when Germany entered "the motorway era" as Hitler called it.

"German workers – get to work", the German Führer proclaimed and resolutely grabbed hold of a shovel to move the first pile of soil in what would later become the motorway from Hamburg over Frankfurt to Basel.



Unemployed Germans were armed with shovels and spades and ordered to perform hard physical labour.

Then, the 720 men set to work, showing everybody the new reality: The men were no longer unemployed – Hitler had given them a job, and they were the first out of several thousand. Fritz Todt estimated that the construction of the new motorways in the Reich required at least 600,000 men.

Hitler will provide work for all

The motorway construction was the first sign that Germany, after Hitler's seizure of power in March 1933, was under reconstruction. The economic crisis and discouragement were to be worked off, and the German people's faith in a grandiose future was to be restored. The best way to convince the population about the power of Nazism was beating unemployment, which at the turn of the year 1932-1933 had reached a soaring 30 per cent of the workforce, or more than six million people.

In his election campaign, Hitler had promised the people "work, work, work", and just three months after the takeover, head of department of the Finance Ministry, Fritz Reinhardt, presented the "Bill to reduce unemployment". The new government set aside one billion Reichsmark for new public construction works and increased State subsidies for private constructions.

The Nazis presented the new motorways as if they were their own invention, even though the first stretch of the Autobahn had already opened between Cologne and Bonn in 1932. The Nazis downgraded this stretch to highway until 23 September 1933 when Hitler put the shovel to the ground near Frankfurt am Main.

Until the war broke out, workers constructed a total of 3,300 kilometres of motorway, but Fritz Todt's promise of 600,000 jobs was never met. In 1933, the number of employed roadworkers was only 4,000, and although the number was at one time



Adolf Hitler inaugurates the Volkswagen factory near Hannover. The Nazi leader had an entire city, Wolfsburg, built to house the thousands of car factory workers and their families.

125,000, it did not have a great effect in the overall unemployment statistics. Far more people got work through the state loans that the Nazis offered to newly-weds, and the loans led to a rapid increase in courting couples getting married. Compared with the previous year, the number of marriages increased by 100,000 in 1933, and as one condition for getting the loan was for the woman to leave work, thousands of jobs became available to the German men.

The Nazis also initiated the first cautious rearmament of the German army. Steelworks and arms factories secretly increased production, and the army slowly crossed the confined limits dictated by the 1919 peace in Versailles. Finally, a large number of Jews lost their jobs when, on 7 April 1933, the Nazis introduced the so-called Aryan Paragraph, which pensioned off public servants of non-Aryan origin.

Economic miracle in Germany

At the turn of the year 1933-1934 – just nine months after the Nazis had come to power – unemployment had fallen by an unbelievable 2.3 million people. This

FRITZ TODT *1891-1942*

THE NAZI BUILDER

■ Engineer Fritz Todt enrolled in the Nazi Party as early as 1922 – and this decision would determine the rest of his career. In 1933, Hitler put him in charge of the motorway construction, and five years later, he was made responsible for a huge contracting organisation that had his name. *Organisation Todt* was organised as an army and grew to 1.3 million employees and forced labourers. The greatest assignment completed by *Organisation Todt* was the construction of the Altantic Wall – the fortification to protect the European mainland from the North Cape to the Spanish border. When the war started, Todt was appointed Munitions Minister, but he died as early as 1942 in a plane crash near the Wolf's Lair – Hitler's military headquarters, which, incidentally, Todt also took part in constructing.

Leader of the Autobahn contruction – organiser of Deutsche Arbeitsfront – behind the Atlantic Wall

result was considered an economic miracle and made an impression outside Germany too. Yet, Hitler wanted more than to just create jobs. Until 1933, Germany had been a very class-conscious society decided over by a rich and well-educated elite. Hitler wanted to break this order, giving all Germans equal opportunities – irrespective of social position, fortune and education.

Therefore, following the seizure of power, the Nazis opened several elite schools for the children of workmen, workers and farmers. The brightest pupils in the municipal schools were hand-picked for training at the Napola schools. The Nazis paid for the boys' education and board and ensured them a career in the new Germany.

To this came tax breaks for workers, children's allowances for families, increased pensions and support for farmers, so that neither crop failure nor falling prices in the world market would be a threat. A welfare state that had never been seen before anywhere in the world was taking shape. A state that provided for all its citizens – or at least for the 95 per cent who were of German origin.

Although the men from the Reich Labour Service were paid for their work, it was far from voluntary. Guards zealously monitored the work performed.

EVERYBODY MUST TAKE HOLIDAY

The workers' right to holiday was also drastically improved. Even before the Nazi takeover, workers were entitled to one week's holiday, but in reality only few of them took it. But with a new Act, the Nazis doubled the number of holidays from six to 12 and stated that everybody must take their holiday. Holiday was essential, Hitler explained, and not only for the benefit of the individual person:

"I want the worker to have enough holiday, and everything must be done to ensure that his holiday and leisure time provide true rest. I want it

because I need a people with strong nerves. Only a people with strong nerves can be used to make great politics", said Hitler to Robert Ley, leader of the Nazi trade union DAF (Deutsche Arbeitsfront).

To ensure that the holiday provided the necessary restoration, DAF set up the subdivision "Kraft durch Freude" ("Strength through Joy"). In its heyday, the organisation had more than 4,000 employees who arranged Nazi mass tourism. Huge hotels and holiday homes were built in areas of natural beauty, allowing the workers to relax and recover for 14 days. The price was affordable – 40 Reichsmark, all inclusive.

The most spectacular project was the holiday area on the island of Rügen in the Baltic. Here, KdF started building a huge hotel, Prora, with 10,000 rooms, which were all to have a sea view. As a result, the hotel would have a total length of 4.5 km. A quay was constructed at the front of the hotel, where KdF's fleet of cruise ships could moor. One of them was the impressive *Wilhelm Gustlow* with room for 1,400 passengers. The construction stopped when the war broke out. No guests ever enjoyed the luxury of Prora, and *Wilhelm Gustlow* sank with 10,000 East Prussian refugees onboard on a January night in 1945.

The German people motorised

The Nazis had more luck with another major project. Shortly after the seizure of power, the acknowledged German car designer Ferdinand Porsche presented his idea of a car for ordinary people – a Volkswagen. Hitler was a car enthusiast and excited about the idea of motorising his people. This was one way of holding his ground in the competition with the USA, where one in five inhabitants had a car. In Germany, only one in 50 was a car owner. Together with Porsche, Hitler put the demands to the new car into words: The price of the Volkswagen was to be a maximum of 990 Reichsmark, and it was to have room for a whole family – two adults and three children. The new car was to do at least 14 km/l and have a top speed of 100 km/h. Only few Germans had a garage, and therefore, it should be possible to leave the car outside in the frost. Thus, the engine could not be water-cooled.

Hitler put pressure on the German car industry to help Ferdinand Porsche complete the task, but the manufacturers did not believe in the project and tried to obstruct it. The work was riddled by delays, and it was not until Easter 1937 that Ferdinand Porsche had 30 cars ready for test drives.

Hitler was immediately enthusiastic about the Volkswagen. He had given up on the German car factories as manufacturers. Instead, he ordered DAF and the leisure organisation KdF to build a new factory in an empty field near Hannover. The DAF leader Robert Ley was convinced that it would become "the world's largest car factory". He set the production capacity at 1.5 million cars a year – more than even the American Ford factories were able to manufacture. The foundation stone to the factory was laid on 26 May 1938 by Hitler near a newly-constructed city, Wolfsburg. Shortly before, he had single-handedly decided that the car was not to be called a Volkswagen, but "KdF-Wagen", and Ferdinand Porsche had to throw out tonnes of advertising material.

The car was not sold by ordinary car dealers. Instead, the buyers had to pay for the car in advance with savings stamps that were sold at 5 Reichsmark a piece. More than 330,000 families paid in advance, but no one ever received a new car. When the factory in Wolfsburg was finally ready to produce cars, World War II had broken out, and production was immediately reorganised to military vehicles and heavy arms.

Nation to be forged together

It was only after the war that the KdF cars began to roll out of the Wolfsburg facility – now under their original name, the Volkswagen. Ferdinand Porsche's idea later became one of the greatest successes in car

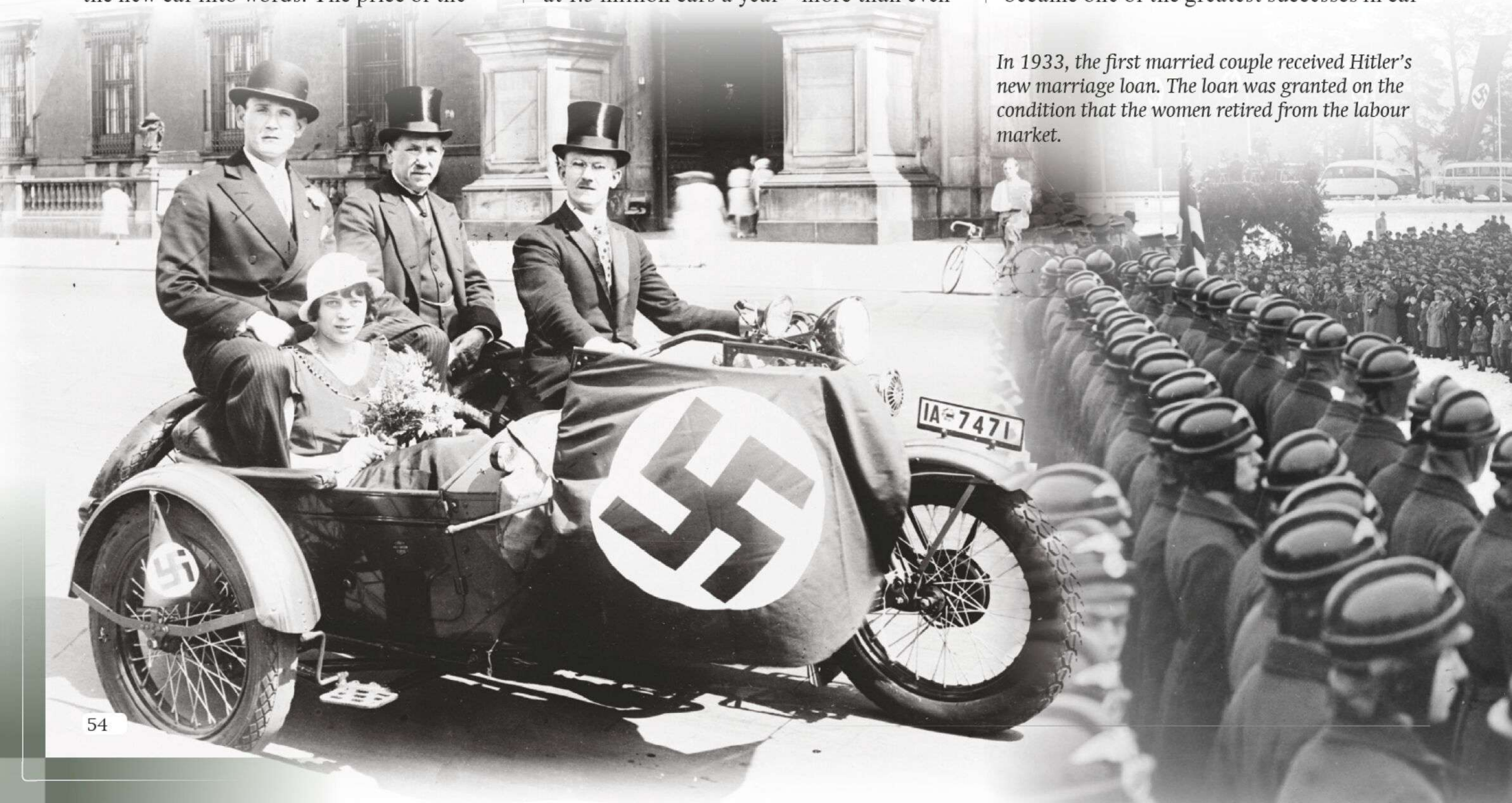
SAME TIME IN THE USA

NEW DEAL PULLED THE USA OUT OF CRISIS

The stock market crash in Wall Street in 1929 sparked a world-wide financial crisis – one of the hardest hit countries was the USA, where 15 million people lost their jobs – approx. 25 per cent of the workforce.

The American President, Franklin D. Roosevelt, widely resorted to the same tricks as the Nazis to create work: He had 122,000 public buildings constructed, built 1m kilometres of roads and 77,000 bridges. The weekly working hours were reduced to 40, child labour was banned and taxes readjusted. From now on, the rich were to pay more in per cent than the poor. The effect soon showed: Unemployment fell, and consumption once again increased.





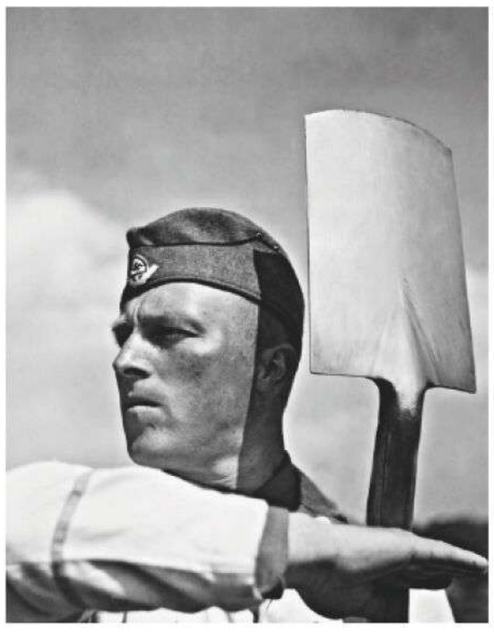
In 1933, the first married couple received Hitler's new marriage loan. The loan was granted on the condition that the women retired from the labour market.



In 1936, the Autobahn was constructed all over the country. Here, outside Berlin, the capital.



Other stretches had already been completed; yet, the number of cars was still very limited.



From 1935, all men were to serve six months in Reichsarbeitsdienst.

history with more than 21 million cars sold. Although the Nazis never managed to give the people a car, the Party was constantly engrossed by the idea of bringing the population together. The Nazis saw the Germans as one people with one fate, and it was decisive that the nation was forged together in an unbreakable "community of race".

As a result, the Nazis banned all opposition as early as 17 July 1933. Establishing new parties became criminal, as the community of race only needed one party, the NSDAP. The same applied to car clubs, sports associations and any other organisations used by the Germans in their leisure time. Hitler did not allow any activity outside the Party's control. The process, which crushed trade unions, parties and leisure time organisations, was called "Gleichschaltung", which can be translated into "aligning everybody". Only women had no place in the frontlines of the community of race. Under Nazism, women in prominent positions were soon a rare sight. Instead, they had to settle with subordinate functions at schools, in offices and shops – but preferably, they were to stay at home, have children and look after the family.

"The concept of emancipation of women has quite simply been made up by Jewish intellectuals. We think it is wrong for a woman to enter the man's world. We think it is right for these two worlds to remain separate", Hitler explained in 1934.

The start-up loans for newly-weds, which the Nazis introduced shortly after the seizure of power, helped create the German model family. In addition to the demand for the woman to retire from the labour market, the loan was reduced by a fourth for every child the family had. The State thus expected the families to have four children, which would then repay the entire loan.

To increase the birth rate even more, the Nazis introduced a special favour to mothers in 1938 in the form of a medal, the "Mother's Cross". The cross was awarded in three categories – bronze for mothers who enriched Germany with 4-5 children, silver for 6-7, and gold for 8 or more.

The first recipient was 61-year-old Louise Wiedenfeller from Munich, who had given Germany eight children. In total, the Nazis awarded more than 10 million Mother's Crosses before the Reich fell in 1945.

EVERYBODY MUST HELP EACH OTHER

Even before the Nazis assumed power, Germany had engaged in great collections to help fellow countrymen in need. Every time, they had given several million Reichsmark to the poor, and this generosity inspired Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels to organise the collections under the name of "Winter Relief of the German People". To the shrewd Nazi, this annually recurring

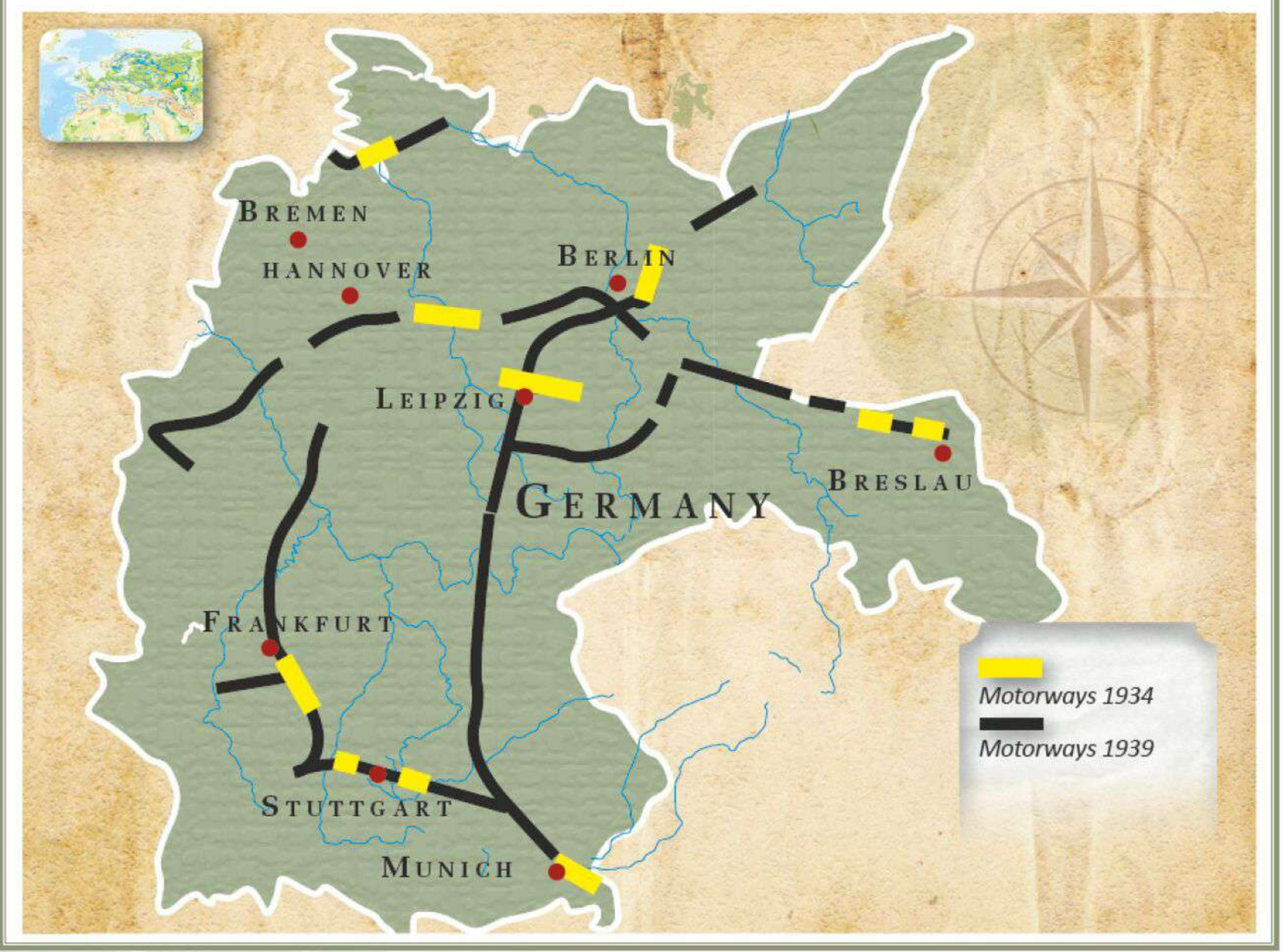
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Thousands of Germans cheered the workers from the Reich Labour Service after the construction of the first 2,000 km of motorway in 1937.

3,000 KM OF AUTOBAHN BUILT IN 5 YEARS

■ *One year after the Nazi seizure of power, the German motorway network was still a disconnected web of bits of roads. Only 108 km of Autobahn had been completed, but before the war, men from the Reich Labour Service managed to construct more than 3,000 km motorway and connect many of the German cities.*



HITLER ENVISIONED THE WORLD'S LARGEST CITY

Tear down the centre of Berlin, and replace it with a new, monstrous metropolis: This was Hitler's vision for the capital of the Third Reich

■ In 1936, Adolf Hitler launched the most comprehensive Nazi construction project so far – the creation of Germania, Germany's new world capital.

Initially, the Nazi leader just wanted to build a 117-metre high triumphal arc and a domed hall with room for 180,000 people in the city centre, but his architect, Albert Speer, soon realised that two such enormous buildings would be ugly eyesores in the relatively flat Berlin. Instead, he suggested to incorporate them in an entirely new city centre. The triumphal arc and domed hall were to be encircled by ministries, a crypt for dead German war heroes, cinemas, theatres, train stations and a grand palace for the Führer. Over the next six years, Hitler's favourite leisure time activity was to participate in the planning of Germania, which, according to the plan, was to be completed in 1950.

In 1939, gangs of workers set out to demolish the first houses. A total of 50,000 flats were to be destroyed to make room for Germania. The Berliners who were forced to move were given a new home in flats owned by Jews, who instead ended up in concentration camps. At the same time, Speer's representatives visited quarries in Norway and Sweden and placed orders for thousands of blocks of granite. The work on Germania continued until 1942, when the war put an end to Hitler's utopian plans.



Speer drew a special street lamp to light up the wide parade street of Germania. Some of the lamps survived the war and today, they are placed at Kaiserdamm in Berlin.





Adolf Hitler and his chief architect, Albert Speer, worked continuously on the plans for Germania.

1. The Great Hall was to be reflected in a huge artificial pool.

2. The Führer's Palace, covering two million square metres, was to be completed in 1950.

3. The Adolf Hitler Square in front of the Great Hall was to have room for one million people gathering to listen to the Nazi speeches.

4. Germania was to run along a five kilometre long north-south axis. Near the Great Hall, the new city was to cross Berlin's famous street Unter den Linden close to Brandenburger Tor.

5. 11 ministries were scattered in Grosse Strasse. To create life in the street, Hitler wanted to build cinemas, theatres, an opera house, a concert hall and a huge luxury hotel along the street.

6. "The names of every one of our 1.8 million fallen soldiers must be chiselled in granite", said Hitler about his plans for the Triumphal Arc, which was to serve as a memorial for those who died in World War I. The 117-metre-high monument could have held the Arc de Triomphe in Paris 49 times.

7. One of the final ideas was an avenue, which was to be flanked by arms captured in the campaigns against France and the Soviet Union.

8. Two railway stations were to frame Germania. From the South Railway Station, there would be a direct vista through the Triumphal Arc to the Great Hall.

Huge hall with room for 180,000 people



In 1920, Hitler drew a sketch of the Great Hall. He kept the drawing for years, certain that one day, it would come true.

■ The Great Hall was to have been the crowning glory on Speer's work. With room for 180,000 people, the monstrous building would, even today, have been the greatest building in the world. At the top, Hitler insisted on having a giant eagle throne over a globe – a symbol of total world dominance by the Third Reich. Even when Hitler announced his ambition of building Germania, expert doubted that the swampy soil in Berlin would be able to hold the massive constructions. Workers therefore built several metre-high test blocks of heavy granite. As foreseen, the walls sank several centimetres during the three years of the test period.

> “Hitler reminded the Germans that no one was too poor to contribute”



Every year, the Germans organised the so-called Winter Relief, collecting money and food for the most needy in the country.

event held several advantages: The collection committed the Germans to a common cause, and it would provide so much money that the State could save on social benefits. It became a tradition for Hitler to start the collection every year in October with a rousing radio speech. In the following months, more than one million volunteers took to the streets to collect clothes and money or sell lottery tickets. In his speeches, Hitler reminded the Germans that everybody had to help. No one was too poor to contribute:

“Everybody must help, rich and poor. Everybody must think: Somebody is poorer than me, and I, as a fellow countryman, will help him”, he said in 1937.

Millions to the poor

The regime’s propaganda speeches worked, and the Germans stood together in the fight against poverty. With time, the amount collected from the Winter Relief grew larger than the means set aside by the State to provide for the poorest people in the country.

The collections were supplemented by one Sunday every month, where German housewives were not to serve the traditional Sunday dinner. Instead, a mixed stew would be served on the so-called casserole Sundays. The difference up to the amount that the family would normally spend on the Sunday meal was to be given to the “Blockwart” of the property – a Nazi supervisor and whip in charge of the contact between the Nazi State and the residents of a block of flats.

In total, almost half a million Germans worked as a “Blockwart” and made sure that the collected money was passed on to the Winter Relief. On a country-wide basis, the casseroles alone raised 30 million Reichsmark every month.



Opinion polls drive everything

Although Hitler distanced himself from Socialism, the movement followed the same ideas about community and justice. After the war, the future organiser of the Holocaust, Adolf Eichmann, said:

“Emotionally, my political opinions were left-wing. The Socialist aspect was at least as important as the nationalist one”.

Therefore, it was in the spirit of the Nazi movement whenever the regime decided to raise taxes for the business community. Some arms manufacturers earned exceptional amounts of money on the rearmament, and the Nazis decided to bring back the money to the Exchequer by means of taxes, which sometimes amounted to as much as 98 per cent of the manufacturers’ profits.

“The increase of the business taxes is received well by the workers”, the intelligence service SD (Sicherheitsdienst) reported in 1938. SD’s conclusion was based on the opinion polls that the Nazis performed regularly to feel the public pulse. This way, the Party quickly knew whether the time had come for yet another tax relief or pension raise so that imminent discouragement among the citizens could be soothed by more welfare benefits – before developing into resistance against the regime.

Germany almost bankrupt

Better pensions, favourable allowances, child benefits, support for farmers, holiday on state-subsidised hotels, public construction projects and massive rearmament of the army... Immediately after the Nazi’s seizure of power, money began to pour out of the Exchequer. Although the costs for unemployment benefits fell with the lower number of unemployed, the savings could not outbalance the huge costs that the Nazis imposed on the country. Welfare state and weapons purchases came at a cost.

The Nazis, however, tried to hide how expensive the welfare really was. As early as 1933, Finance Ministry officials had to forge the figures in the public budgets. The fraud was necessary to prevent the trust in Germany’s economy from disappearing. If that happened, the country would, once again, be hit by inflation as in the 1920s and 1930s. Unemployment would rise, and the Nazis would probably lose control over the public opinion. Fiddling with the figures, therefore, was the only recourse.

Soon, the manipulation was so bad that the figures could no longer be published, and in 1935, Hitler simply banned the publication of the Budget. The bottom line would have shown that the Nazis were driving the country into national bankruptcy.

One of the successful tricks devised by the Finance Ministry to hide the large state deficit was to let the weapons industry lend money to the State in order to rearm the army. Together with the State, the country’s largest weapons manufacturers ran a firm under the innocuous name of the Society for Metallurgical Research (Mefo).

There was no official connection between the State and Mefo, and Mefo did not have any money at its disposal. Yet, by means of an ingenious , the company nevertheless ordered weapons worth billions of Reichsmark every year. Payment

MAGDA GOEBBELS *1901-1945*

THE GERMAN MODEL MOTHER

■ In 1930, Magda Quandt engaged in a stormy relationship with Joseph Goebbels, which ended with marriage the year after. The cool and beautiful Magda soon won a position as Germany’s “first lady” – which she cemented by giving Joseph Goebbel’s a son and five daughters.

In spite of her burning desire to gain an official post in the Nazi regime – for example as the head of the office for mothers’ issues – Goebbels rejected her every time: “The woman’s job is to be beautiful and bring children to the world”, he decided. Instead, Magda Goebbels focused on filling the role as mother to Nazi perfection, and she appeared on several occasions as a happy family mother with her husband and children in the newsreels in the cinemas.

Married to Joseph Goebbels – received the Mother’s Cross – First Lady of Nazi Germany

The German Winter Relief was to provide food to the country's poor. Under great media presence, Hermann Göring went hunting for wild boar to those starving.



Girls from Bund Deutscher Mädel ready with the collection boxes for the Winter Relief in 1935.



Hitler's personal bodyguard – the SS corps Leibstandarde Adolf Hitler – gave several concerts. All admission charges went to the needy.



Soup kitchen in Berlin. Once every month, Germans gathered to make inexpensive food together. The money that was saved on the meal went to the poor Germans.

was made using promissory notes issued by the weapons factories and payable by the State as it earned money. Until 1938, almost half of the State's military investments were paid using Mefo bills.

THE JEWS PAY THE PRICE

The Nazis got cash from the Jews, who after 1933 were harassed by means of special laws and bans. The Nazis were hoping that the Jews grew so tired of living in Germany that they decided to emigrate. To obtain permission to leave the country, however, the Jews had to pay a so-called "flight tax", and often they had to sell their property and possessions cheaply. The flight tax alone brought in a billion Reichsmark, yet it was simply not enough. In late 1937, the Finance Ministry sounded the alarm. In this desperate situation, the actual exploitation of the Jews began: They were told to take stock of their fortunes, and any person who owned more than 5,000 Reichsmark, was asked to forcibly convert the fortune to government bonds. This way, the State got hold of approx. eight billion Reichsmark.

The compulsory conversion of the Jewish assets did not last long, though. In early November 1938, the alarm was raised again – this time from the central bank: "There is a lack of two billion Reichsmark. There is an imminent risk that the Reich will have to suspend payments".

This information was received a few days after the murder on the German diplomat Ernst vom Rath, who was killed in Paris by a Polish Jew. The murder led to the Night of Broken Glass, where 1,400 synagogues and a large number of Jewish properties and shops were destroyed. Further, Hermann Göring imposed a one billion Reichsmark fine on the Jews.

As the terms of payment had been set by the Finance Ministry, the Jew fine brought in far more than Göring's original demand, and the Exchequer was saved for a few months. But in January 1939, the German central bank informed Hitler that state bankruptcy was unavoidable: The plundering of the Jews in Austria and Czechoslovakia increased, but the money never sufficed. If the Nazis wanted to gain the goodwill of the Germans, the welfare state had to be maintained. Occupation of Poland was inevitable, and if the invasion started a world war, it would be worth it. ■


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DAILY LIFE IN THE THIRD REICH

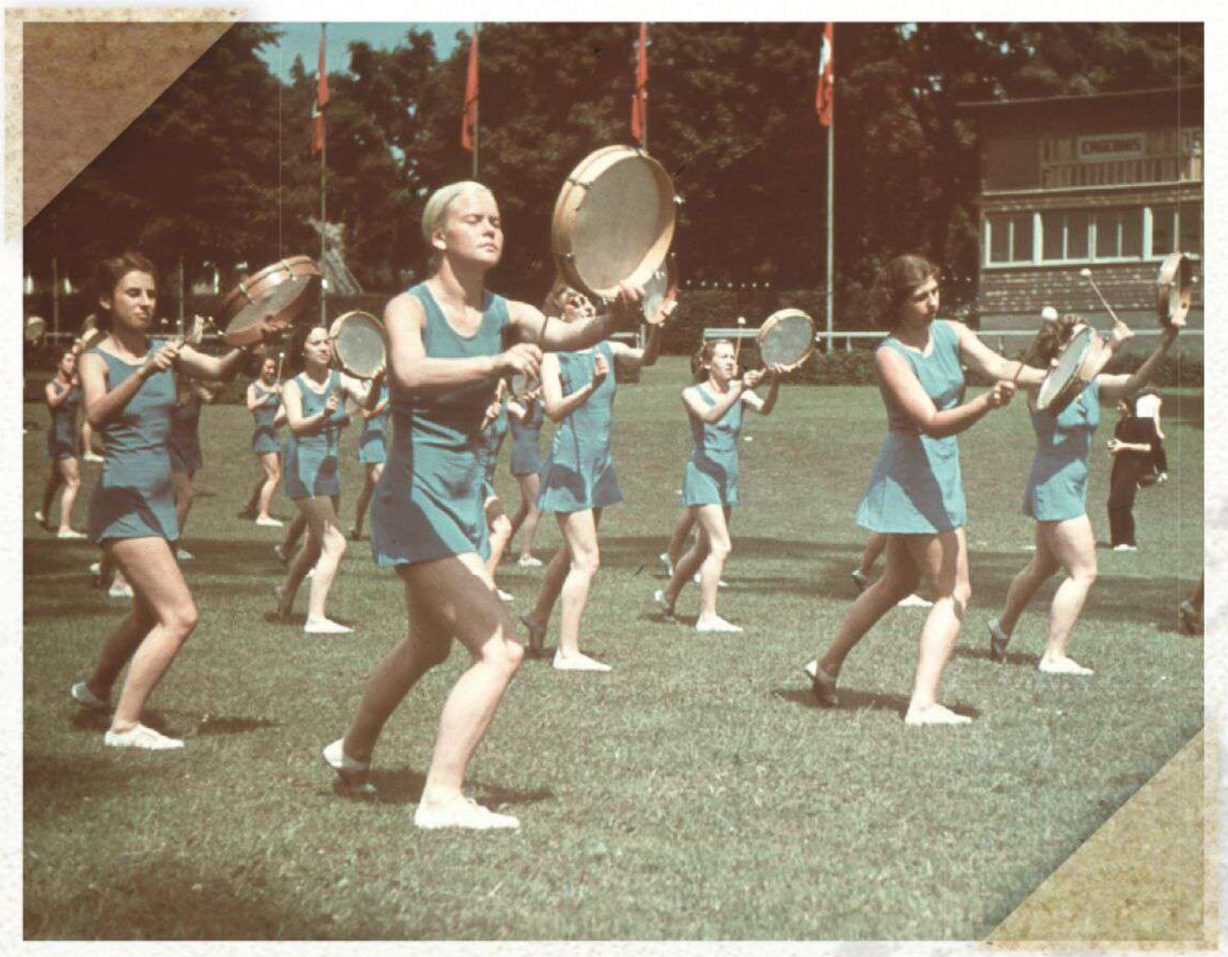
In the six years that passed from Hitler's seizure of power in 1933 until the outbreak of World War II in 1939, the standard of living for ordinary Germans increased dramatically. By confiscating wealth from the Jews and borrowing billions abroad, the Nazis raised money for construction projects that gave millions of people a job – and means to pamper the population with welfare benefits that had never been seen before. The new middle class went camping, did team sport and enjoyed new technical wonders, such as television and the Volkswagen. However, a new war was constantly looming on the horizon.

Young people were encouraged to get together early – and start creating big German families.

More than 100,000 volunteers helped driving the Strength through Joy *programmes. Money came from compulsory membership, which cost half a Reichsmark every month.*



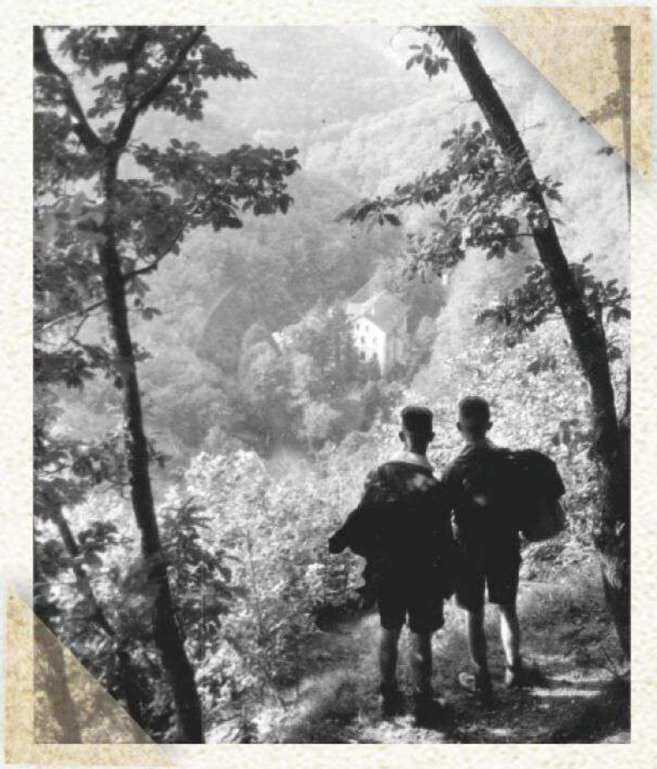
While millions of Germans were sent on state-paid holiday in Hitler's luxury resorts near the Baltic, others chose to invest in the hottest trend of the time: A caravan.



Strength through Joy arranged team gymnastics every day for everybody. Most often, the activities were separated according to gender.

FUN AND GAMES

■ For the Germans, the first years in the shadow of the swastika were an endless State-paid party. The Party sponsored every conceivable sports activity and encouraged the citizens to take advantage of the numerous activities offered by the Nazi leisure time organisation Kraft durch Freude (Strength through Joy). The State party reached its peak in 1936, where Germany hosted the Olympic Games. Few noticed that only Aryans were allowed to represent the Nazi State.



The Nazis praised nature, and this made the Germans go hiking in the mountainous countryside.

German sports enthusiasts had to enrol in one of the Nazi associations, which had monopoly on all sports activities.









Olympics In 1936, for the first time ever, the Olympic torch was sent from Olympia in Greece to Germany. A total of 3,331 torch bearers took the torch the 3,187 km to Berlin, where thousands cheered the runners in the streets...

...the host country was the most successful in the Games and won the most medals – 89 in all, of which 33 were gold...

...against the racial policy, the Germans cheered the black super runner Jesse Owens from the USA.



As early as April 1933, schools were divided according to race. Here, "pure" Aryan children cheer at the start of the summer holiday.



The number of births soared - while thousands of "unsuitables" were sterilised.



Particularly reproductive mothers were rewarded by the Party with medals and, not least, more money in the pay packet.



The Party granted special loans to newlyweds, and the number of marriages exploded despite the racial laws.



Christmas party at a Volkswagen factory. The board in the background holds information from Deutsche Arbeitsfront – Hitler's State-paid workforce.



Deutsche Arbeitsfront sent theatre wagons to even the smallest of German villages – to the great joy of the village children.

FAMILY AND CHILDREN

■ The family was the core value in the Nazi universe. Father, mother and children – preferably at least four – were to ensure Germany's future greatness. The man as the conscientious provider and soldier, the woman in the home as mother of the children, who were to create the glorious future of the Third Reich.



Peg top from the western part of Germany.







Gender roles German teenage girls parade with their dolls. Young women participated regularly in shows, competing about being the best mother for their wax dolls...

...while the boys dug trenches and played at war on the beach in the still peaceful Germany...

...gas mask drills became compulsory for both genders – here in Berlin in 1935.



1935

14TH SEPTEMBER

Parades and marches prepared millions of boys from 10 years of age to become soldiers.

GERMAN YOUTH ARMY

HITLER YOUTH ARE TRAINED FOR DEATH

Hitler thinks that Germany's youth should be tough as leather and hard as Krupp steel. The Führer forces all German boys into the Hitler Youth, where millions of children are brainwashed and trained to sacrifice for the fatherland on the battlefield.

Germany, 1935

THE STAGE IS SET



After World War I, the German people – in particular the young – are disillusioned. Hitler's newly formed Nazi party seizes the opportunity and creates a youth group that will restore the country's pride through discipline and targeted teaching. Boys flock to the Hitler Youth, but the party has a plan for its association.

The giant stadium in Nuremberg echoed with the cries of 54,000 boys and girls. All gazed excitedly up at the stage when the head of the Hitler Youth, Baldur von Schirach, emerged with the Reich's leader, Adolf Hitler.

After a brief introduction from von Schirach, the cheers gradually faded to allow the Führer to speak:

"You are now lining up for this roll call for the third time; more than 54,000 representatives... which grows from year to year", Hitler began before describing his vision. "The German youth of the future must be slender and supple, swift as greyhounds, as tough as leather, and hard as Krupp steel".

The crowd burst into cheers again, forcing Hitler to pause. Eventually, he ended his speech with the words: "You are the nation's future: the future of the German Reich!"

The entire assembly stood up straight, puffing out their chests in their uniform. When Hitler descended from the pulpit, a wave of enthusiasm washed over him. With a smile, the Führer moved along the rows of boys in brown shirts and shorts and girls in summer dresses, all stretching their necks to get a glimpse of their leader, proud to be among the chosen.

Hitler paid tribute to the young

During September 1935, boys and girls had travelled to Nuremberg from all over Germany. Many had taken the train or been transported in lorries, but the most committed had marched all the way. Every year up to party day the youth movement organised so called Hitler marches. Some walked hundreds of kilometres across Germany from their home town, bearing the local association's pennant.

This commitment was characteristic of the members of the Hitler Youth, which after the Nazi takeover in 1933 grew into a mass movement.

The organisation came from modest beginnings, formed 13 years earlier in 1922 by young law student Kurt Paul Gruber and a small group of boys aged 15-16 in his home town of Plauen in Saxony.

Gruber was an ardent Nazi, fascinated by Hitler's promises of a Germany built by youth and carried by the community. The year before Hitler had taken power in the newly established Nazi party, and the leader rarely missed an opportunity to talk about how important youth was.

Gruber subsequently put all his energy into giving the Nazi party a strong youth movement. With money from a local clothing manufacturer he began a recruitment campaign, which was a great success. Within a few months, Gruber procured 2,500 members in the state of Saxony alone.

Hitler soon took Gruber and his association under his wing, and at a party meeting in July 1926 he officially linked the organisation to the Nazi party. The movement was named Hitler Youth, League of German Worker Youth and Gruber was the first Reichsjugendführer (National Youth Leader).

The organisation operated in relative obscurity in its early years. From time to time, young Nazis could be seen marching with Hitler's

1907-1974

NAME **BALDUR VON SCHIRACH**

TITLE REICHSJUGENDFÜHRER

Youth leader was steely Nazi

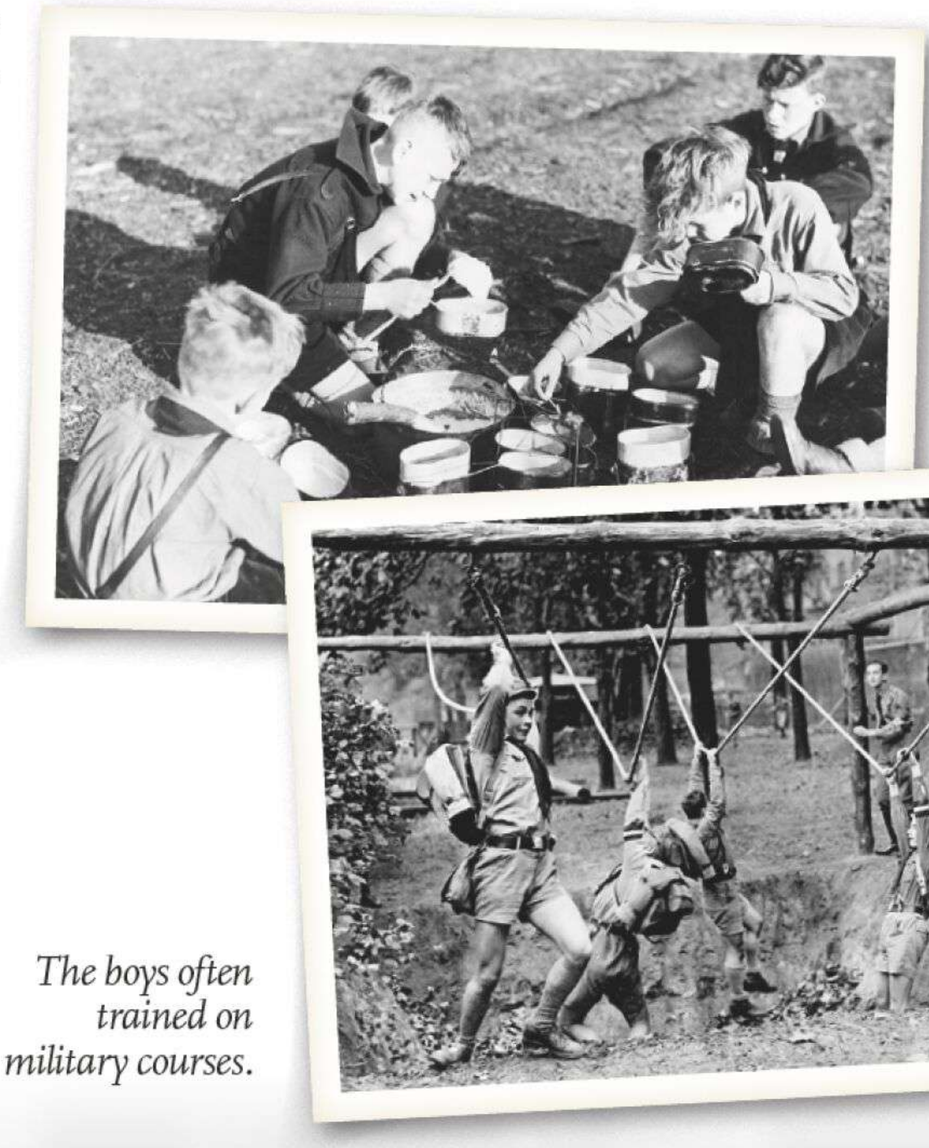
Baldur von Schirach's older brother Karl committed suicide in grief over the defeat in World War I and the Treaty of Versailles' tough sanctions against Germany. The tragedy sent von Schirach into the arms of the Nazis, where he became leader of the Hitler Youth.

After the war, he was give a 20 years prison term – not for his leadership role in the Hitler Youth, but for crimes committed during his time as Gauleiter of Vienna.



- **Wrote books and poetry.**
- **Retreated to southern Germany.**

In the spirit of being a soldier the boys experience life in the field – here cooking breakfast.



The boys often trained on military courses.

paramilitary SA corps, while the boys handed out Nazi pamphlets for the party. Occasionally they got into fights with political opponents on the far left, a primitive test of strength that was popular with both camps.

Killed Nazi was martyred

On 24th January, 1932 a tragic incident thrust the young Nazis into the public eye. On a cold Sunday Herbert Norkus, a 15-year-old Hitler Youth from Berlin, was stabbed to death by a communist gang. Norkus was given a hero's funeral with Joseph Goebbels – Hitler's propaganda chief – providing a speech, and the soon the boy had become a martyr for the youth movement.

Norkus' death also provided an opportunity for Baldur von Schirach. Von Schirach, a young man of noble background, had heard Hitler speak in 1925 and was convinced of Nazism's superiority. Just three months prior to Norkus' death in October 1931, von Schirach had displaced Gruber and become Reichsjugendführer. He needed a propaganda victory to cement his position and boost support for the youth



The children got used to being away from home when the corps, for example, went to party days in Nuremberg.

Junior soldiers carried weapons

Putting boys in uniform educated young Nazis for a life as soldiers. Hitler Youth members also learned drill skills and how to handle weapons.

Like the SS, the Hitler Youth was marked by rituals and symbols to build a group spirit. Members should feel they'd been specially chosen.



1 Weapons badge was given after weapons training.



2 The badge bears the inscription "For services in HJ".

The club looked like a hand grenade and was designed to be thrown during training.

Armband was red with a white stripe and a large swastika.

Oblique belt was part of many Nazi uniforms.

The hat with a red stripe could be worn on the belt.



3 The dagger bore the Hitler motto: Blut und Ehre (Blood and Honour). The dagger was shaped like a bayonet.

The trousers were black. Members of the Hitler Youth almost always wore shorts.



5 The triangle showed which local branch the member was attached to.



4 The buckle was decorated with the German eagle above a swastika.



Gefolgschaftsführer was a middle rank in the Hitler Youth.

UNIFORM

movement, and successfully linked Norkus' death with German heroic ideals and the role that Hitler intended for youth when he gained power in Germany.

"What the Hitler Youth became since January 1932 it owes to a great extent to the sacred symbol of that youthful willingness for sacrifice and heroism called Herbert Norkus", von Schirach stated at Norkus' grave in 1935.

Von Schirach made his pilgrimage to Norkus' grave an annual event and celebrated the young man in songs and poems he wrote himself. For him, Norkus' death was a holy martyrdom – a theme that von Schirach repeatedly drove home to Hitler Youth members.

"The more who die for the movement, the more immortal it becomes", he said in one of his speeches. "The Hitler Youth can face its critics with an historic reply: its own dead".

Von Schirach's sense of melodrama and propaganda was on a par with Hitler and Goebbels and he soon pulled in more members to the rapidly growing movement.

The Reichsjugendführer also made fulsome use of rituals. For example, the swearing-in ceremony – where young boys

"The more who die… the more immortal it becomes"

Baldur von Schirach, Reichsjugendführer, on the effect of martyrdom on the Hitler Youth

swore allegiance to the Führer and Germany on Hitler's birthday (20th April) – was made a national event. Many thousands of Germans sent gifts for his birthday, but the youth gave themselves.

Germany was infiltrated

One of the thousands of young Germans led into the movement was Henry Metelmann. Metelmann was born in Altona in Hamburg and joined the Hitler Youth at the age of 10 in 1933.

After Metelmann started school a few years earlier, his Christian mother had enrolled him in the Protestant youth organisation Jungschar – a traditional scout movement. Hitler's takeover in 1933 saw all youth organisations banned or taken over by the Hitler Youth. Metelmann soon found out what this meant. One day, while the children in his group were waiting to go in to a Jungschar meeting in the parish church, the group was picked up by a Hitler Youth corps and with drums banging, were marched around the city. After that, it became officially subject to the local Hitler Youth group.

The family was not thrilled. But the father's objections that the family could not afford brown shirts, which was part of the uniform, was answered with a package of two hard-wearing brown uniform shirts – a gift from the party.

Metelmann couldn't remember having any particular enthusiasm for the movement, but slowly the schoolboy began to warm to life in the Hitler Youth:

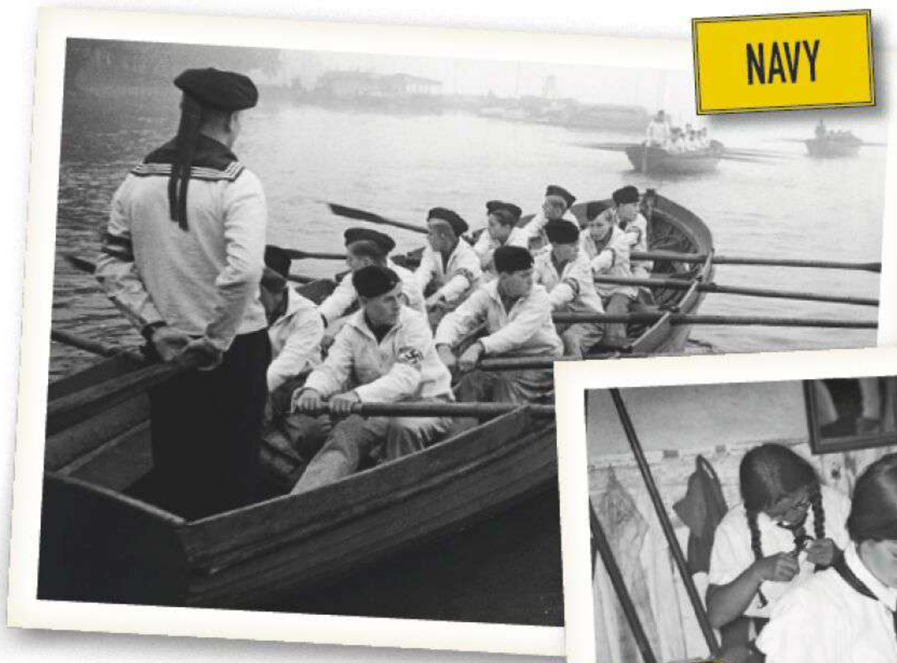
"I thought the uniform was smashing, the dark brown, the black, the swastika and all the shiny leather. Where before we seldom had a decent football to play with, the Hitler Youth provided us with decent sports equipment".

The boys were organised into local groups, which met at least once a week and often on Sundays. The meetings took place in a clubhouse – Heim – that could be anywhere, such as disused factories, an old barn or a cellar under a residential building. Metelmann participated eagerly in the work and among other things, lime-washed the walls of the troops' clubhouse with other boys. Afterwards, the walls were decorated with Nazi flags and posters, guns, steel helmets and especially selected quotes from Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*.

At the meetings, members toed the party line on important ideological topics such as scientific racism, the Nazi party's history and the role of women in society. Afterwards the boys would sing from Hitler's own songbook.

Metelmann was most excited about the summer camps that lasted for two to three weeks, and which only cost his parents a token amount. Throughout his childhood Metelmann had been accustomed to the idea that travel was reserved for wealthy people so he enjoyed the holidays to the full and welcomed the opportunity to go somewhere new every year. The camps were held in different parts of Germany. Metelmann visited an old castle in Thuringia in central Germany and the Baltic coast near the Polish border. The spread of the camps was not a coincidence: children should learn about the fatherland, the country that everyone should be prepared to die for.

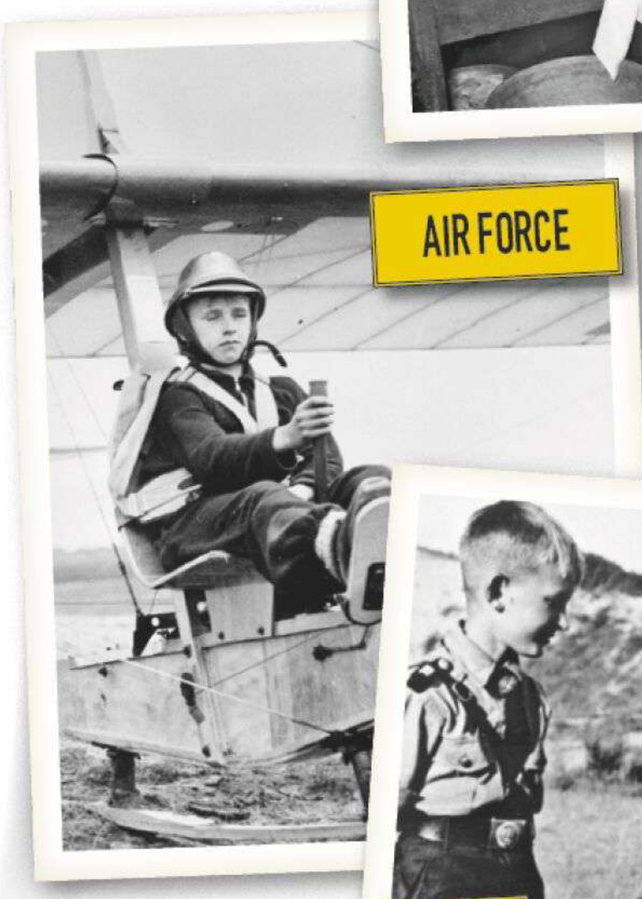
"It was largely through the Hitler Youth that I learned how varied and beautiful Germany, my Germany, was, which in turn instilled an unconditional love for my Fatherland, coupled with an almost holy preparedness to defend



Marine-HJ, a naval branch of the Hitler Youth, was formed in 1935.



A girls' main activity was to train for a life as a housewife.



The Hitler Youth exploited Germans' keen interest in flying.



Gun training was considered vital, so even little boys shot at targets.

it... even to the point of laying down my life", Metelmann later wrote in a book.

Officers impressed teenagers

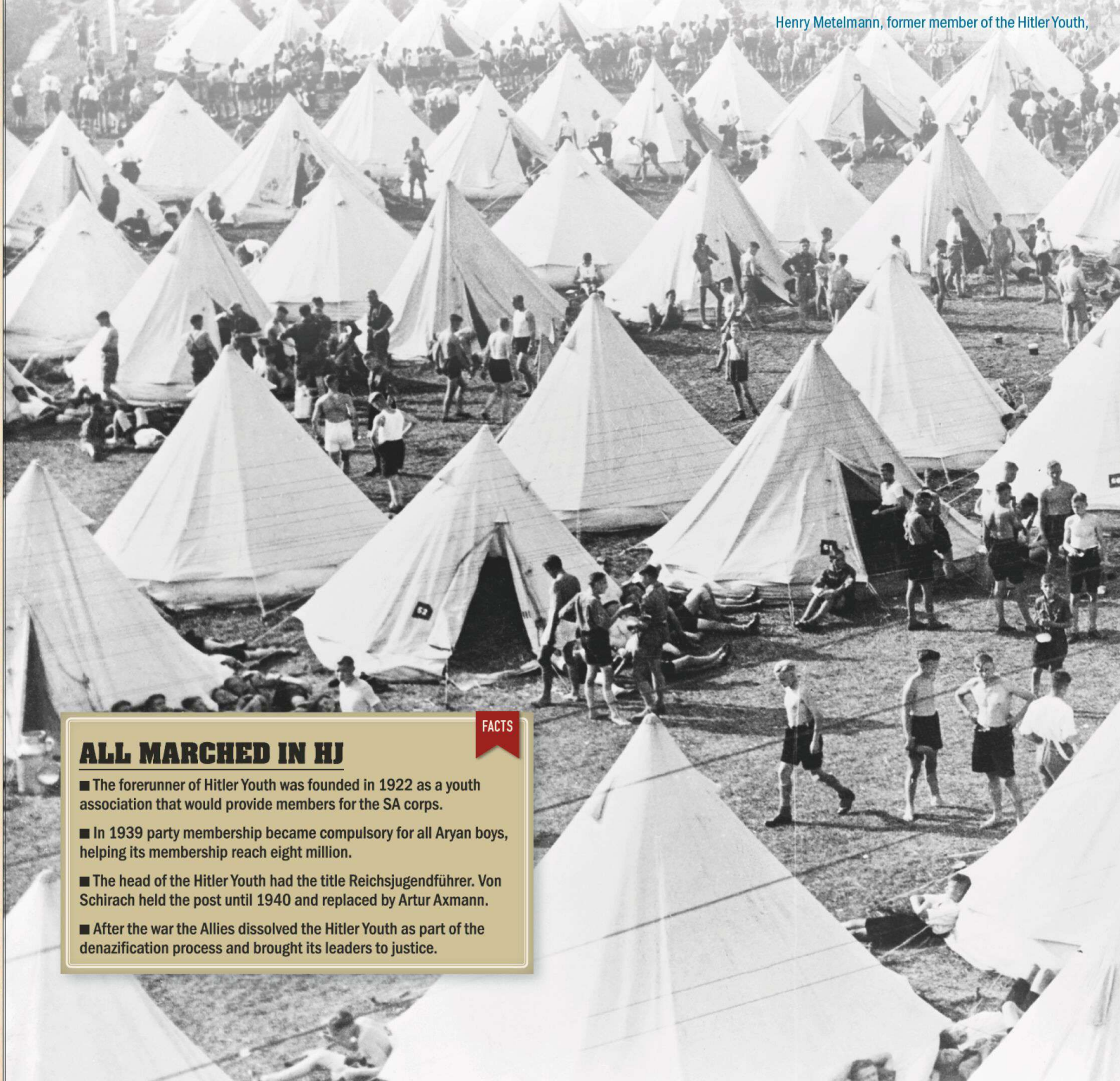
On camping trips boys lived a free life. They played ball, swam and slept in tents. But behind the play the situation was more serious. As the groups were walking, one of the leaders would suddenly shout:

"Attacking planes coming in low from the left" or "hostile machine-gun fire from the right". The boys had to duck and take cover. Between the war games were also activities like training to throw a grenade, shooting, digging and exercises to sneak around in the terrain without being seen. The boys also received training in war theory and history where leaders drew battle lines from famous battles in the sand, and the camps often were visited by uniformed Wehrmacht officers. The men exuded strength and confidence, and the teenagers listened fascinated when soldiers recounted the modern weapons that the Hitler regime had provided Germany with: submarines, armoured vehicles and fighter jets.

As time passed and Germany prepared for war, the Hitler Youth took more and more of children's time at the expense of their schooling. When Metelmann began primary school, he was being taught six days a week. In 1937-38 the Nazi-controlled Ministry of Education, however, introduced a so-called Staatsjugendtag, which meant that on Saturdays the

"Now I could show the Führer

Henry Metelmann, former member of the Hitler Youth,



FACTS

ALL MARCHED IN HJ

- The forerunner of Hitler Youth was founded in 1922 as a youth association that would provide members for the SA corps.
- In 1939 party membership became compulsory for all Aryan boys, helping its membership reach eight million.
- The head of the Hitler Youth had the title Reichsjugendführer. Von Schirach held the post until 1940 and replaced by Artur Axmann.
- After the war the Allies dissolved the Hitler Youth as part of the denazification process and brought its leaders to justice.

boys focussed completely on the Hitler Youth. With lunch bag and canteen Metelmann and his comrades ran around a field where the boys trained in battle all day.

Participants were divided into blue and red teams, each with a coloured string tied around their upper arm. One group had to defend a particular position – for example, high on a field – while the rest tried to occupy the site. In practice, the goal was to tear the armband from the other team, which was then dead and had to leave the battlefield. Metelmann accepted his fate. He hated fighting but was soon used to the experience. It soon became a natural part of everyday life.

War camps were also better than the alternative. For boys who were not members of the Hitler Youth, Saturdays brought hours of repetitive Nazi party ideology and history – a substitute that certainly scared most.

Membership of the Hitler Youth was – in principle – voluntary until 1939, but the pressure to participate was huge. In early 1935, the association had about four million members, but this was not enough for the ambitious von Schirach. In a New Year speech at the turn of 1936, he declared the "Year of the Deutsches Jungvolk", emphasising that membership was crucial for the nation as a whole.

"All troublemakers out! Youth united in the Hitler Youth", the text read.



what I was made of"

when he was a tank driver on the Eastern Front

Large rallies like this in Russenwiese at Nuremberg attracted young people from all over Germany.

Under the slogan "Hitler Youth serves the Führer", von Schirach launched a huge propaganda campaign.

Through radio and newspapers, in schools and at sports events, young people were invited to sign up under the swastika. Von Schirach had access to local directories and sent letters to all German parents of children born in 1926. At the same time, schools were reminded that teachers should persuade hesitant students to join the organisation.

Some refused, but resistance came with an extremely high cost. Metelmann remembers how Walter Römer, the only boy in the class who was not a member of the Hitler Youth, was cross-examined by the Nazi regime informant, school biology teacher Karl Sieg. Sieg suggested that Römer's parents could be harbouring anti-Nazi attitudes– something that everyone in Germany knew could mean death.

Boys would go to war

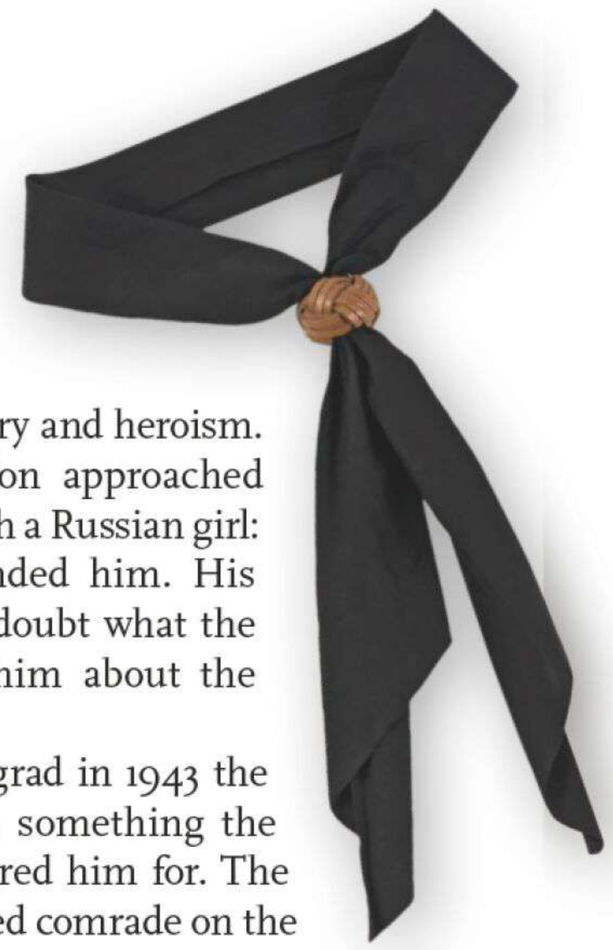
When news of the outbreak of war came in September 1939, many in the Hitler Youth were enthusiastic. The boys looked forward to a final showdown with the "Untermenschen" (sub-humans) to the East and fulfilling their role as the master race.



In the army, members normally started with supporting roles like firefighting and mail delivery, but as the war progressed, teenagers were sent directly into the field.

Metelmann received the news of the outbreak of war with joy and the 18 year old volunteered for the army. Later he was sent to the Eastern Front as a tank driver and was proud to show the Führer what he was made of.

On the Eastern Front the Hitler Youth member discovered, however, that war was not just about victory and heroism. When Metelmann's division approached Stalingrad, he fell in love with a Russian girl: when he was sick she tended him. His experience caused him to doubt what the Hitler Youth had taught him about the Russians' racial inferiority.



A black neckerchief with brown leather knot was standard attire.

After the defeat at Stalingrad in 1943 the soldier witnessed brutality, something the Hitler Youth had not prepared him for. The Red Army had left a wounded comrade on the road, and a German officer ordered the man be run over. Later, soldiers shot some teenage girls who were desperately searching for a hiding place.

Metelmann realized that the youth summer camps of singing and good-natured ruckus had not simply been a pleasant pastime. Like many others, he had been trained as cannon fodder for the Führer. Hitler Youth members fought on nearly all fronts, and everywhere their death rates were high.

For those who survived the war, facing the full truth about the Hitler regime was overwhelming. Metelmann, whose last effort in the war was to defend a small town on the Rhine, was captured by Americans in 1945. At first he refused to believe the images from the concentration camps, but slowly he realised that everything he had learned about Nazi Germany was based on a lie. Through his memoirs, Metelmann later tried to make peace with his past.

"The feeling of guilt for what in a collective way I have done to others, especially the people of Russia, lies very heavily on me. Coming to the evening of my life now, I sometimes wonder what it has been, a drama, a tragedy, a crime or a comedy. I cannot be quite sure", he wrote shortly before his death in 2011.

Black boy wanted to join the Hitler Youth

As the son of an African father and a white mother Hans-Jürgen was one of a few black children who grew up during Nazi racism.

Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi was the result of a rare mixed race in Germany. His father was the son of a Liberian diplomat and his mother Bertha Baetz was German.

Like his classmates Hans-Jürgen was fascinated by Nazi parades and dreamed of becoming a member of the Hitler Youth. But as he was not Aryan, he was excluded and was no longer allowed to go to the playground he'd enjoyed for years. At one point his school headmaster devised a school contest to see if a class could get 100 percent membership of the Hitler Youth. Massaquoi had a chance to fulfil his greatest wish, but was told he could not take part or join the organisation as it did not match up to the Aryan ideal.

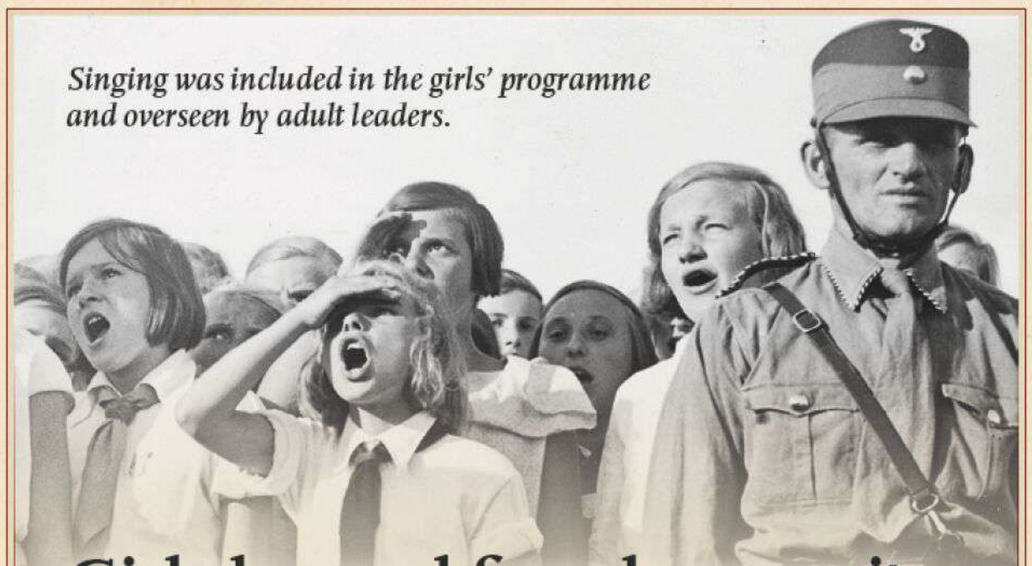
Later, his skin colour turned out to be an advantage as he could not become a soldier and so avoided being sent to the front.

After the war, Massaquoi emigrated to the US and became a journalist.

Hans-Jürgen was born in 1926 and was in his first year of school when Hitler came to power.

All ages had associations

Nazi ideology was to tap into a child's life from when they were very young. Therefore, party organisations established war training (boys) and home education (girls) for all ages. It was an uncompromising experience, and young people do didn't toe the line were quickly expelled.



Singing was included in the girls' programme and overseen by adult leaders.

Girls learned female pursuits

JUNGMÄDELBUND ("YOUNG GIRLS LEAGUE", GIRLS 10-14 YEARS) took the youngest girls. The children were taught a woman's place: sewing, child care, cooking and ironing.

Girls were not full members initially. After a welcome ceremony the children had to pass tests, including in sport, before they had the right to wear the uniform.

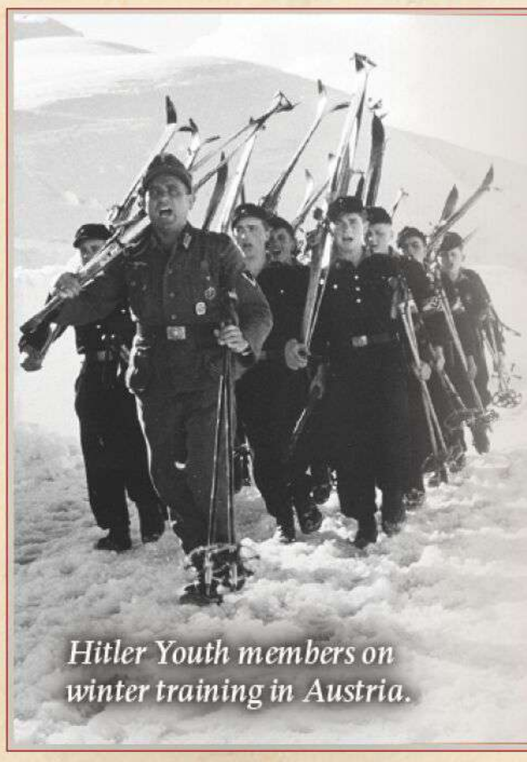
Doctors approved by head shape

DEUTSCHES JUNGVOLK ("GERMAN YOUNGSTERS", BOYS 10-14 YEARS OLD) was designed to prepare boys for the Hitler Youth, but the youngest were exposed to hard training. Among other things, children were sent on long marches and learned to handle firearms.

Membership for young people became mandatory in 1939, but only Aryans were allowed. At 10, boys had to have their pedigree examined and head shape and eye colour checked by a doctor before being accepted.



The yearbook was required reading for "Pimpfe", as members were called.



Teens copied soldiers

HITLER JUGEND ("HITLER YOUTH", BOYS 15-18 YEARS) was the Nazis' main youth organisation. Here the boys were prepared for life as proud German soldiers through hard education, training and lots of field exercises.

Life in the Hitler Youth was in many respects an imitation of life in the army. Hitler Youth operated a ranking system, which largely corresponded to the SS, and boys were sent on week-long exercises far from home.

Hitler Youth members on winter training in Austria.



The girls in the Bund Deutscher Mädel should be healthy German mothers to the core.

Young women worked in agriculture for military service

BUND DEUTSCHER MÄDEL ("LEAGUE OF GERMAN GIRLS", GIRLS 15-18 YEARS) would secure Germany a supply of strong and benevolent young women who would have children with German soldiers and raise new generations of superior Aryans.

In addition to daily indoctrination and training in domestic activities, the girls were required to do a year of military service, often on a farm. The idea was that girls from towns and cities should learn how the German nation was rooted in agriculture.

After this members could continue in the organisation Glaube und Schönheit ("Faith and Beauty"), which was open to young women between 17 and 21 years, but where membership was voluntary. In Glaube und Schönheit women were taught – among other things – about family finances.



THE VOICE OF NAZISM

1926-1939

The Nazis were the first in history to take full advantage of propaganda. Newspapers, radio, newsreels and art bombarded the citizens in the Third Reich with warnings against Jews and Communists every day – and drew a picture of Nazism as the Germans' salvation and Hitler as the people's saviour. Everything was orchestrated by a tiny, club-footed doctor who lived in Berlin: A fierce Nazi named Joseph Goebbels.



1926-39



1926 Joseph Goebbels is appointed Party leader in Berlin.

1933 The Nazis set up a Propaganda Ministry.

1933 Hitler orders engineers to develop a radio for the Germans.

1939 2,000 men are employed in the Propaganda Ministry.

1926 >>> 1933 >>> 1939 >>>

In 1926, Joseph Goebbels, untiringly, spoke in the streets of Berlin to attract voters.

In 1926, Berlin was a disgrace to the Nazis. Party offices in the suburbs were empty and unmanned. In the streets, the Communists marched without opposition. And in the local election, only 137 Berliners had voted for NSDAP – a number that was lower than the number of Party members in Berlin. If they were to have any hope of seizing power in Germany, the citizens of the country's most populous city had to be converted.

For most of that year, Hitler contemplated who could sell the Party's vision in Berlin. He settled for a 28-year-old National Socialist journalist whom he had met shortly before. Joseph Goebbels was committed and diligent, intelligent and brutal, calculating and spontaneous. Most importantly: An ardent admirer of Hitler.



Newly-elected Dr. Goebbels arrives at the Reichstag. He was the only politician to be interviewed for the radio and share his message.

In November 1926, Goebbels got off the train at the Anhalter railway station in Berlin. 16 years later, the Jews of Berlin would be put on deportation trains here to go to concentration camps, but to Goebbels in the autumn of 1926, the Third Reich purges lay well into the future. He had arrived in Europe's second-largest city, which was prosperous and vibrant. The four million inhabitants lived in a city of contrasts. Immense wealth flourished alongside extreme poverty. Cheery cabarets, film premières and a wild night life dominated by night, while loud Communists were marching in the streets by day. The city was full of neon signs and slogans, and poster men on every street corner were fighting for attention. Berlin was "a pool of sin", Goebbels concluded. He despised the fact that Berlin was a stronghold for Communists and Social Democrats and, not least, the home of the country's largest Jewish community, 180,000 people, who left their mark on the city's cultural and economic life.

Speeches held on a truck

Soon after his arrival, Goebbels realised the full extent of his huge task. The first thing he did was to publish a new Party newspaper in Berlin, "Der Angriff" – The Attack. The name was appropriate, as the newspaper was to attack political opponents hard and unremittingly.

The first editions of the newspaper, in Goebbels' own words, "unfortunately resembled a depressed cheese". Therefore, he decided to drum up a Party orchestra of 40 men, buy an old Opel platform truck and get out in the city to speak. With grandiose music in the streets, the hot-headed doctor attracted attendants before spewing out his hateful talk against everybody: Against the Communists, the middle classes, the upper class, Social Democrats and, not least, Jews. For months, the slight doctor went from school to school and from neighbourhood to neighbourhood to spread poison, sarcasm and hatred for hours. "This small and dark Dr. Goebbels with his fanatical eyes and thin lips", a journalist wrote after having attended a Party meeting.

Propaganda works

The very opportunity to attract attention in the media was precisely what Goebbels was striving for. He gained control over the SA – the Party thugs – and arranged torchlight processions through Communist neighbourhoods to provoke fights.



Early propaganda. Printed on red paper to appeal to Socialist voters

But Goebbels' real battle field was the speaker's rostrum. With his speeches, he managed to rouse the supporters and tear the enemy to pieces – and several public speaking bans were imposed on him. The newspapers wrote about all the trials, and the Nazi support grew. At the Reichstag election in 1928 – the first election since >>>>



> “Untiringly, the slight doctor went around in his Opel to spread poison, sarcasm and hatred”

HATEFUL PARTY PAPERS

With the purchase of Völkischer Beobachter in 1920, the Nazis entered the German newspaper market. Over the next years, several papers were opened and served as the Party's mouthpice.



DER STÜRMER
FOUNDED IN 1923

The tabloid based in Nuremberg overflowed with aggressive anti-Semitism. With caricatures and harsh words, it described Jews as sadistic sex criminals who threatened the pure German blood.

DER ANGRIFF
FOUNDED IN 1927

Joseph Goebbels founded Der Angriff, which for 18 years served as the mouthpiece in Berlin. The newspaper ruthlessly attacked any opponent.



DAS SCHWARZE KORPS
FOUNDED IN 1935

SS members had to to read the official corps paper, which was full of articles about bloodsucking Jews, the threat of Communism and biting remarks about American culture.

VÖLKISCHER BEOBACHTER
FOUNDED IN 1920

With means from a Bavarian manufacturer, the Nazis purchased Völkischer Beobachter, which served as the official Party newspaper. The last edition was published on 29 April 1945.





DAS REICH
FOUNDED IN 1940

This newspaper did not contain the same harsh propaganda as the others. Instead, it analysed the progress of war on all battlefields, and described the background for, among other things, the V-1 rocket attacks against London.

Goebbels had arrived in Berlin – the Party won 1.6 per cent of the votes in Berlin. This was below the country average, but compared to the starting point a "beautiful success", as Goebbels noted in his diary. The election won NSDAP 12 mandates in the Reichstag – one of them went to Joseph Goebbels, who now had a steady income and parliamentary immunity.

After the first Reichstag session, a radio journalist was ready to talk to the parliamentarians who came out. Everybody declined except the newly-elected Nazi group chairman:

"Dr. Goebbels. A few words, if you please", the journalist asked, humiliated by the many rejections. Goebbels immediately saw the opportunity to present his views in a nationwide medium:

"The time of this Reichstag has ended. I am convinced that is must be dissolved, as it is no longer in accordance with the people's will", he proclaimed on the radio. "The biggest joke of democracy is that it is destroyed by the means that it delivers to its mortal enemies", he sneered.

GOEBBELS CREATES A MARTYR

On 14 January 1930, 22-year-old SA man, Horst Wessel, was shot in his flat. The confrontation was private and concerned the collection of an old debt, but the perpetrator was a Communist. After a month in hospital, Wessel died from blood poisoning. Goebbels arranged a funeral that set the whole city on fire and attracted thousands of attendants.

Standing by Wessel's grave, Goebbels began to talk and eloquently praised Horst Wessel as the Nazi equivalent of Jesus – a "Christian Socialist – divinity is in him", as he said. Shortly before his death, Wessel had written a poem, "Die Fahne hoch, die Reihen fest geschlossen", which the Nazis now began to sing, the melody an old sailor's tune. The song was made the Party's official song and renamed the Horst Wessel song. Goebbels himself prepared precise guidelines for when the song was to be sung at election meetings – and at what volume.

Nine months later, the Nazis started the Reichstag election campaign. After his results in Berlin, Joseph Goebbels had been made responsible for the campaign, and inspired by American elections, he organised an election campaign "that had never before been seen" in Germany.

All over the country, walls and lamp posts were filled with election posters, and Goebbels organised a speech command which covered all of Germany by car, preaching Nazi hatred. During the last days of the campaign, he arranged 24 mass meetings in Berlin alone. The result was overwhelming – even to Goebbels. The Nazis stormed into the Reichstag with 107 mandates and, all at once, became a powerful force in German politics. In spite of the result, Goebbels was not satisfied.

> “Goebbels organised an election campaign never seen before in Germany”

“Only even more grandiose means will make it possible to convert the masses”, he predicted and intensified the propaganda. He was now the official leader of the nationwide Nazi election campaigns, and in 1932, when Hitler was very close to seizing power, Germany felt the full force of Nazi propaganda.

The established parties considered propaganda to be mean lies and refused to use the Nazi tricks. All the while, Goebbels' streamlined machine hit the Germans at full force. For the presidential election he arranged the “Hitler over Germany” campaign where the Führer, as the first European politician, flew from city to city to speak to the people. And while Hitler was flying across the country, Goebbels had records produced with his speeches and party songs in a size that allowed them to be put in an envelope and sent out all over Germany.

Prussian girls praise Hitler

In connection with the Reichstag election in March 1933, Hitler was to address thousands of people in Königsberg. Volunteers filled hills and mountains with “freedom fires” that lit up the dark March night. The Prussian church bells rang, and the SA went in a torchlight procession through the cities, where loudspeaker vans were ready to transmit the Führer's speech.

Arriving in Königsberg, Hitler was received with fanfares, drum beats and roaring Heil Hitlers. On Goebbels' order, the Party had provided a group of “blonde children, little East Prussian girls” and equipped them with bunches of flowers to give to Hitler. That evening, no one could avoid listening to Hitler – in the square in Königsberg, via the loudspeaker vans in the streets or on the radio.

What was even more important: German TV recorded the entire session and broadcast pictures from it in the newsreels the following weeks. This was total propaganda, and it worked. 17 million Germans voted for the Nazi Party on 5 March – even in the former so difficult Berlin, the Party came first.

Ministry grows

After the seizure of power, Goebbels could finally reap the fruits of his great work. He took the seat as leader of the newly-created Ministry of Information and Public Enlightenment, with its head office in Berlin. “35 years old and already a minister”, the new propaganda minister happily wrote in his diary.

Goebbels organised his new ministry in several departments, which were responsible for various parts of communication in public life – for example, newspapers and the foreign press, theatres, literature, film industry and art. He was in charge of three heads of department and 350 employees and had a budget of 14 million Reichsmark. Six years later, in 1939, the number of government officials had risen to more than 2,000, and the budget had increased more than tenfold to 187 million Reichsmark.

Speech corps
Thousands of SA men travelled the country and gave speeches about Party politics.

Goebbels was, however, slightly worried about the ministry's name. He preferred “Culture and Public Information”, so that the purpose was less obvious, but Hitler persisted. The Führer was passionate about the opportunities offered by propaganda, and in his book, “Mein Kampf”, he had dedicated two chapters to describing the objectives and means of propaganda – without concealing his view on the people:

“The receptivity of the great masses is very limited, their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is enormous. Consequently, all effective propaganda must be limited to a very few points and must harp on these in slogans until the last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan”.

Hitler used mass meetings, in particular, as his field of action, where he managed to spellbind huge masses with his powerful



On Goebbels' order, German radio engineers developed a radio for the people. The so-called Volksempfänger ensured that the Nazi leadership could bombard all small German towns with propaganda every day.

HORST WESSEL 1907-1930

THE NAZI MOVEMENT MARTYR

Law student Horst Wessel enrolled in the Berlin branch of the Nazi Party in 1926. He soon impressed Joseph Goebbels, who promoted the young Wessel to leader of one of the SA troops in the city. In 1929, he gave up his studies and devoted himself to working full-time for the Party. Wessel wrote the Nazi battle song “Die Fahne Hoch”, which can be translated into Keep the flag flying. Wessel was shot in a flat in Berlin by a local Communist, Albrecht Höhler. Höhler was sentenced to six years' imprisonment, while Wessel was made a saint in the Nazi movement. At the seizure of power, “Die Fahne Hoch” became the second official German national anthem, and at the huge annual gatherings in Nuremberg, the Nazis honoured Wessel. Albrecht Höhler was killed by the Gestapo in 1933.



Leader of SA troop 34 – wrote the lyrics to the Party battle song – Nazi martyr

speeches. Goebbels, however, developed techniques that reached Germans in every conceivable life situation – and he warned against turning propaganda into a science – rather, it was a skill comprising various tools, each fitting for a particular situation:

"It makes no sense to discuss propaganda: It is not a theoretical matter. Propaganda is good if it leads to the desired result, but bad if it fails to achieve the intended success", he said.

Leather jacket replaced

With the seizure of power in 1933, Goebbels' opportunities for steering the public opinion grew explosively – but his role changed in character. So far, his job had been to ensure that the Party was mentioned in the newspapers and to rouse Party supporters with marches and mass meetings, but now, he had become part of the State. The objective was to maintain power and develop the Nazi State and ideals.

Goebbels therefore removed his long leather jacket, which he had been wearing during his years as a street fighter. Now, he dressed like a statesman in suits and surrounded himself with noble adjutants. The propaganda, too, became more subdued, as Goebbels no longer had to make himself heard above the opponents. He merely needed to maintain the Germans' illusions about the excellence of Nazism to ensure that they did not rebel. He ensured calm by only providing the Germans with the news and information that the Nazis wanted.

A new act prohibited the Germans from listening to foreign radio stations, and all German newspapers were under strict censorship. The newspapers received guidelines from the Propaganda Ministry about subjects not to be written about. The so-called Editor-in-Chief Act from 1936, where all editors-in-chief were hired and paid by the Nazis, ensured strict Party control of all editorial offices. Journalists had to be Aryan, "politically reliable" and have at least one year's training. Jewish journalists were fired with immediate effect. Approx. 1,300 journalists lost their jobs.

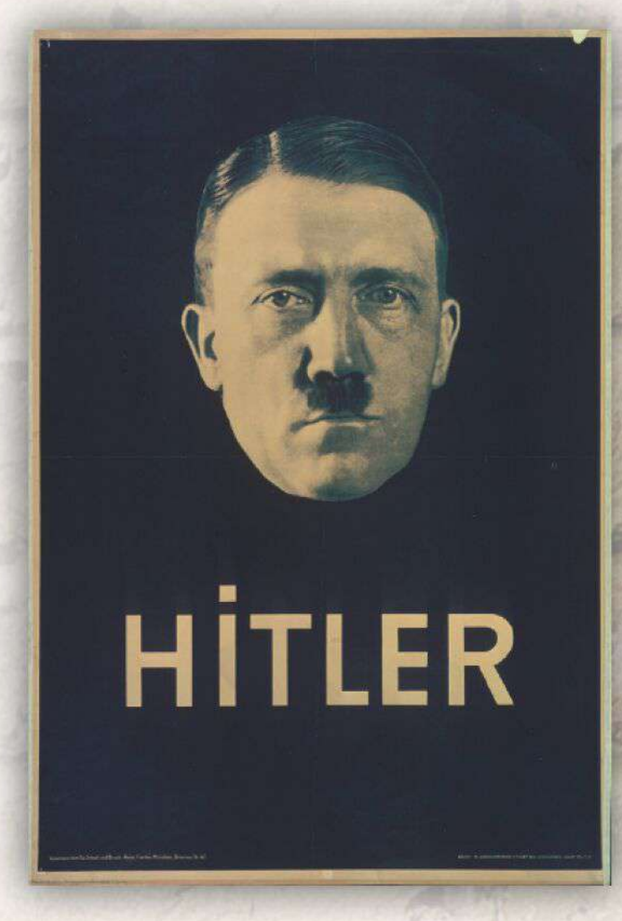
Goebbels wants pop music

More important than newspapers was the radio – the most efficient mass medium of the time. Before 1933, every German Land had its own radio station which local Nazi leaders expected to take over after the seizure of power. But Hitler and Goebbels realised that they risked losing power if local Party members were given free speaking time, and the radio stations came under the Propaganda Ministry as one.

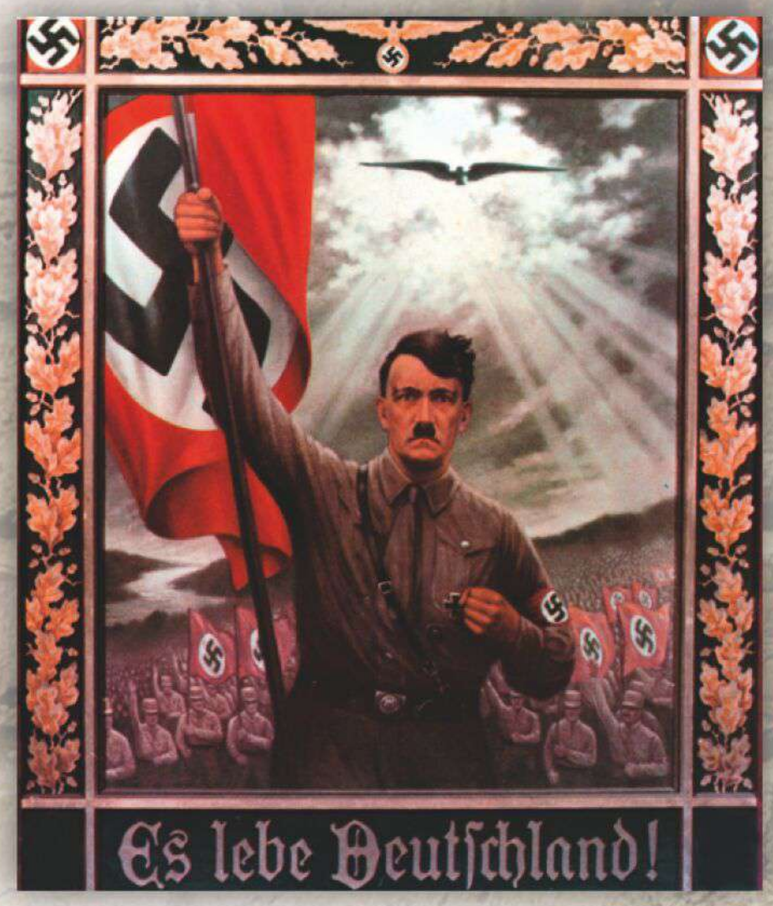
Goebbels was aware that the Reichs Radio was not to develop into an uninteresting transmitter of party news. Therefore, he ordered for hours of popular music to be played and as much live commentary as possible. The radio had to become popular so that the Germans would also listen when the Nazis spoke. Censorship and condem-

PROPAGANDA POSTERS

Under Goebbels' leadership, Nazi poster propaganda changed in nature. From densely written pamphlets for the politically interested to simple messages aimed at the masses.



The 1932 election campaign was dominated by colourful posters. To stand out, Goebbels made a very simple poster, where only Hitler's name and face adorned the black background.



The iconic poster from 1936 portrays Hitler as Germany's Messiah. Behind him, the German eagle descends from the heaven, sent from God.

The Germans were urged to get a Volksemp-fänger so that they could listen to the regime's announcements.



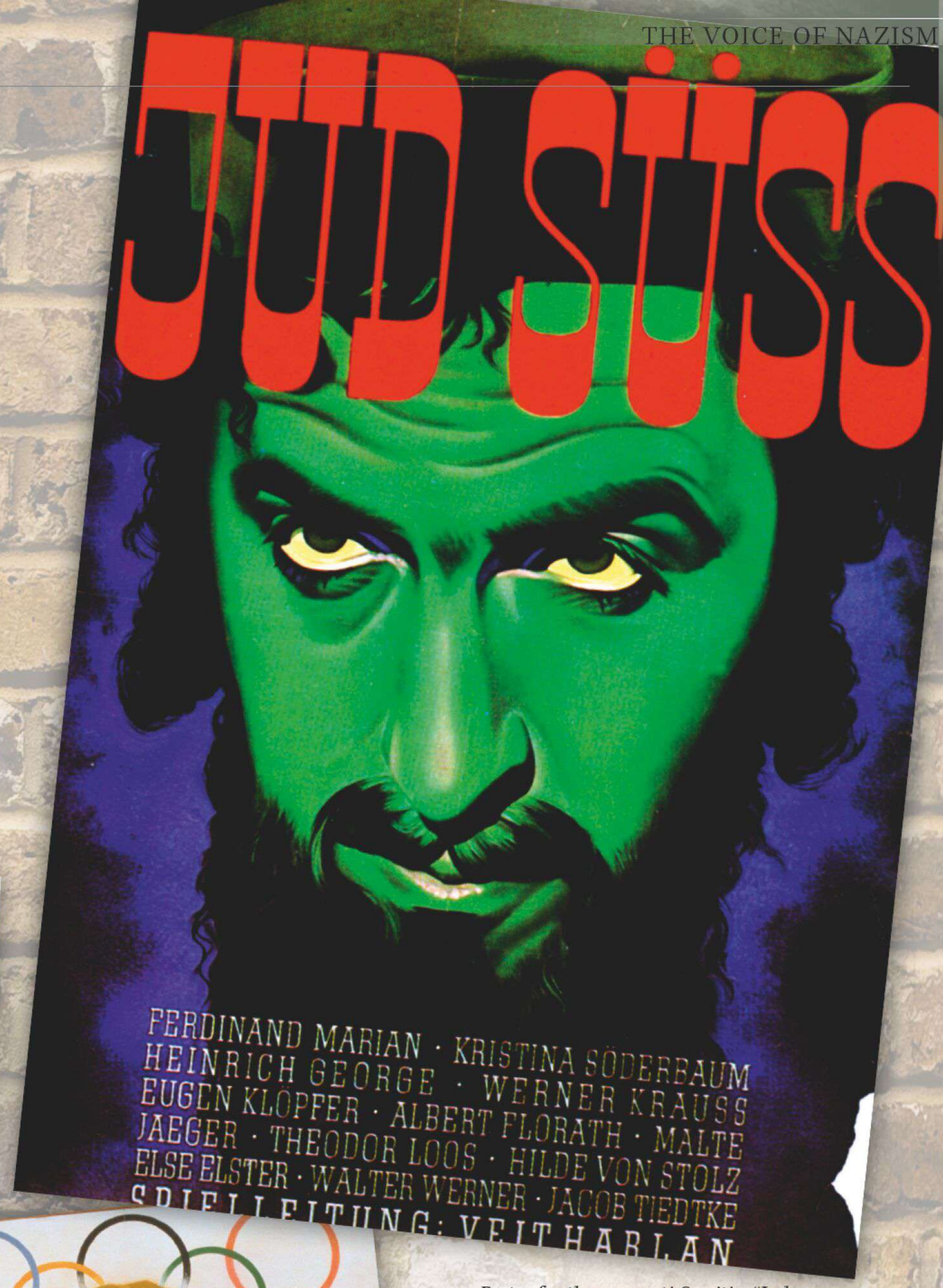
"Komm zu uns" – come to us – was the slogan of the Hitler Youth recruitment offices.



The Propaganda Ministry bombarded the population with Hitler's demand for Lebensraum. This poster demands the former German colonies in Africa be returned to the Reich.



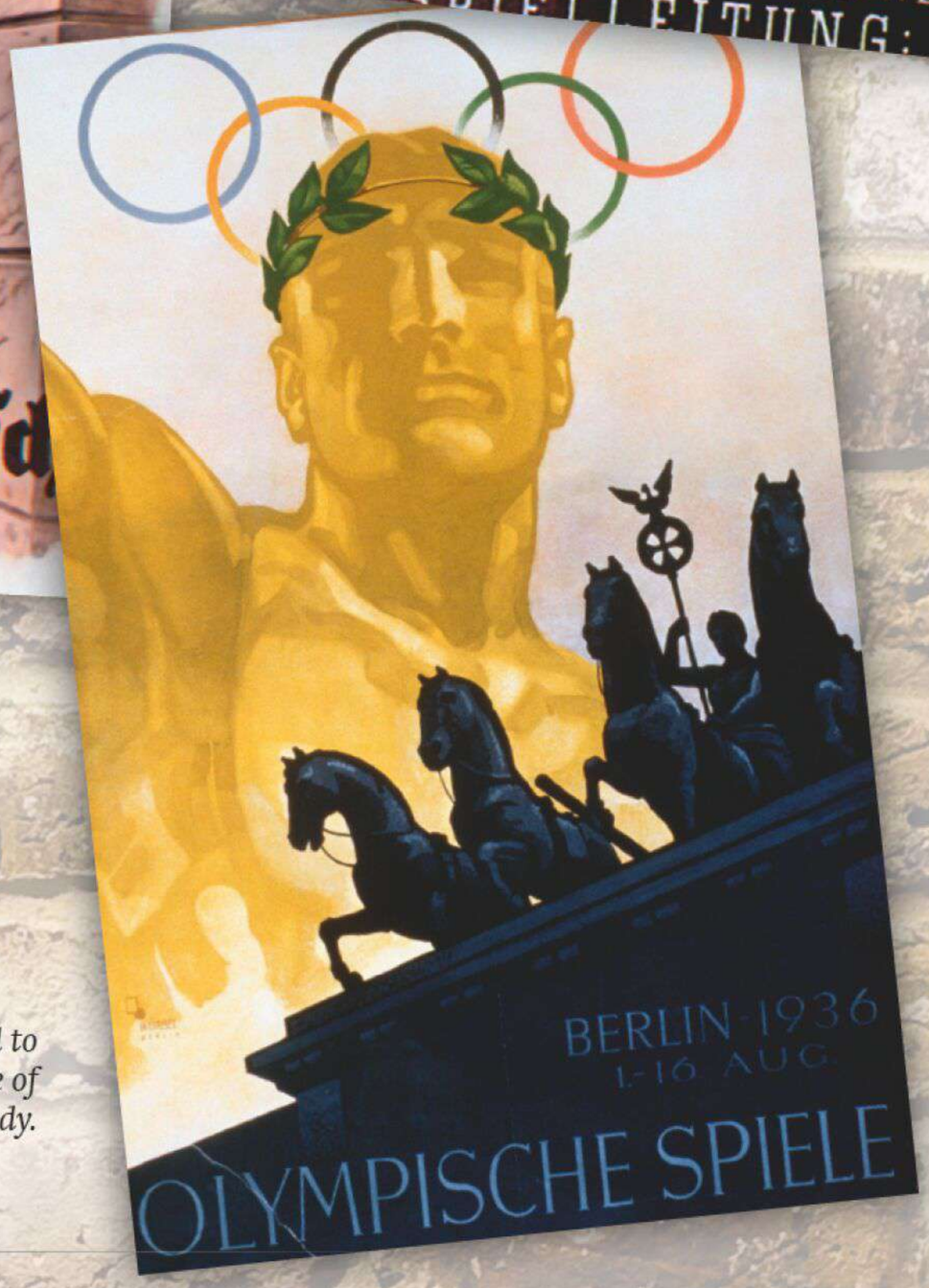
"We arm the body and soul", the Reichsarbeitsdienst poster announced. Forced labour in the service was sold as a golden opportunity to grow strong and strengthen Germany.



Poster for the very anti-Semitic "Jud Süss" from 1940. The film was watched by more than 20 million Germans.



To ensure self-sufficiency, the nation was called on to only purchase German goods – and reminded about the economic recovery that Hitler was responsible for.



The 1936 Olympic Games were used to sell the Nazi view of the importance of building a perfect and healthy body.



Recruitment poster for farm work. Every year, Hitler Youth members were called on to help with the harvest.

nation also hit many of the great painters of the time. In great travelling exhibitions, the Nazis showed their "degenerate" art to allow the Germans themselves to study the "cultural decline". Hitler and Goebbels visited one of the exhibitions together in 1938. For two hours they walked among the pictures – in their own words – shocked:

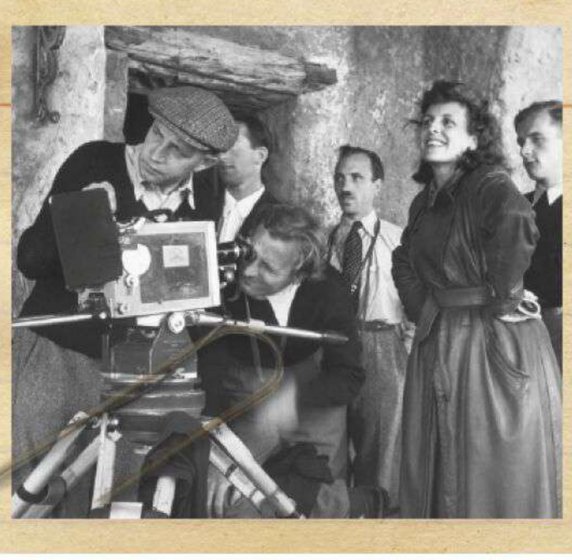
"Not one picture finds favour. The Führer agrees that they must be confiscated without compensation. We will exchange some of them for good masters abroad", Goebbels wrote in his diary.

While the Führer did not hide his interest in art, Goebbels' great passion was film. He knew that the general public did not listen to his political indoctrination – it had to be addressed with much greater subtlety. So the film industry experienced great expansions, and the Propaganda Minister took an active part in the projects.

A pleasant sideline business of his position was the fact that he could quite openly make passes on the actresses since he held the power to determine their career. If they did not willingly lie down on his "casting couch", the moviemaking would stop at once. Only few dared to say no, and in the film studios outside Berlin, the Minister always went by the name "The Goat of Babelsberg". In the late 1930s, anti-Jewish films hit the German cinemas, including "Jud Süss" and "The Eternal Jew". The films portrayed the Jews as a thievish and murderous people and were an unpleasant omen of the fate that would hit the European Jews within a few years.

Before the start of World War II, propaganda played a central role in the preparations for war. Hitler ordered Goebbels to create a portrayal of Poland as an aggressive country, whose soldiers kept attacking German border troops. This paved the way for the German people's acceptance of the attack in September 1939. To Goebbels personally, the war became an opportunity to develop his propaganda project. In the last days of the war, he considered it a personal victory that the citizens in the formerly so stubborn Berlin kept fighting the Soviet superior force. Goebbels killed himself on 1 May 1945 – the day after Hitler had committed suicide. ■

TECHNICAL | CULTURE | ECONOMY | DAILY LIFE



Romance films were most popular

Almost 1,500 actors, directors and photographers left Germany when the Nazis seized power. Nevertheless, Goebbels managed to maintain the film production in the country, and until the end of the war, 1,086 feature films were launched. After the war, propaganda films such as Leni Riefenstahl's film about the Olympics (1936) and "The Eternal Jew" (1940) have attracted most comment, but the majority were comedies and love films – which many Germans went to watch in the cinemas.

> “Hitler ordered Goebbels to create a portrayal of Poland as aggressive and whose soldiers attacked German border troops”

“I love him”, wrote Goebbels about Hitler in 1926 and made it his main task to impress the Nazi rhetoric on the Germans.





TIGHTENING THE GRIP

1933-1939

In 1933, Hermann Göring established a new secret Prussian police corps which was to monitor anti-Nazi agitators. During the next years, the corps, which became known as the Gestapo, spread fear among the German population. No one was safe from scrutiny, as the Gestapo had informants in every block of flats. Before long, homosexuals, gypsies, disabled people and anyone who said something wrong were hunted by the Gestapo. Hitler's dictatorship became a paranoid surveillance society.



1933-39





1933 Hermann Göring sets up a new secret Prussian police corps – the Gestapo.

1934 Heinrich Himmler assumes control. The Gestapo becomes national.

1935 The Nuremberg Laws are passed. In future, marriages between Jews and Aryans are illegal.

1938 Thousands of Jews are moved to camps near Poland.

1933 1934 1935 1938

On 10 May 1933, students stormed into the university, libraries and book shops in Berlin. Here, groups of young men began to tear down books from the shelves. Thousands of books ended on trucks and were taken to Opernplatz in the centre of the capital. When darkness fell, SA men with torches lit a huge fire, and 25,000 books written by authors such as Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Ernest Hemingway disappeared in the flames. The German Reichs Radio broadcast from the event all evening, and before midnight, Joseph Goebbels came to the microphone:

"German men and women! The time of Jewish intellectualism is over", the Propaganda Minister stated. The situation was similar in 34 university cities across Germany, and the book burning was one of the first examples of the systematic persecution of everything Jewish which was to follow – and an early symbol of the enforced orthodoxisation of the German way of thinking.

An important means in the strict control of the German way of thinking was the newly-created Geheime Staatspolizei, which would later be known as the feared Gestapo. The secret police was Hermann Göring's invention. As the Interior Minister of Prussia, and thus commander-in-chief of the police in the Land, the pilot hero had isolated the department of intelligence in April 1933 and established the Gestapo instead. From the beginning, the task at hand was clear: Göring's secret police was to track down and fight any threats against the State. After the first purge of political friends and enemies in the year after the seizure of power, the Nazis began to systematically oppress ordinary Germans using fear, violence and murder. Everything was coordinated from Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse 8 in Berlin, which soon became the most feared address in Germany. The big building used to house a school for industrial craft and design, but in May 1933, the Gestapo moved in and made the building their new headquarters with a prison. The building would be used for brutal interrogations and became the very symbol of Hitler's terror regime, where no one could feel safe.

The Gestapo was to have been called GPA (Geheimes Polizeiamt), but the name reminded Göring of Stalin's secret police, GPU.

Best ones end in the Gestapo

Unlike parts of the army and police corps, Göring decided not to man his secret police with fanatical Nazis. Instead, he hand-picked the best policemen in the Reich and gave them extraordinary powers. Unlike everybody else, the employees in the secret police were not subject to the German judicial system. Offended citizens could not complain about arrests and torture, and, as the only ones in the country, the Gestapo had the right to arrest and detain people in concentration camps without bringing them before a judge. Werner Best, the Gestapo's chief legal advisor, described it very simply:

"As long as the Gestapo perform the Führer's will, their actions are legal".

In April 1934, when Heinrich Himmler assumed responsibility for the secret police from Hermann Göring, the Gestapo grew from being a Prussian police corps to having offices throughout the country. Before the end of the year, the secret police had its tentacles in all corners of Germany.

Although the Germans soon felt that the Gestapo agents had eyes and ears in every room in the country, Himmler's police corps was actually a very small organisation. In Frankfurt, for example, which had more than a million citizens, the corps had only 41 employees.

To Himmler, it was not decisive whether there were actually informants on every street corner, but that people were under the impression of being under surveillance no matter where they were. The leading Nazis not only wanted to oppress active resistance, but also talk and thoughts that could harm the regime. To maintain and spread fear, newspapers regularly published news about enemies of the State who had gone to prison or had been executed.

Illegal to mention concentration camps

The policemen in the Gestapo did their work very thoroughly and recorded potential enemies of the State in an extensive file system which, in time, included hundreds of thousands of citizens. A critical comment about the regime could lead to a visit from the policemen dressed in black and an "invitation" to an interview at a Gestapo office – not least after the Nazis passed the "Ma-

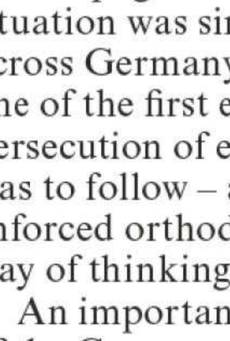


In 1934, Heinrich Himmler became responsible for the German security services, including the Gestapo.

EYE WITNESSES

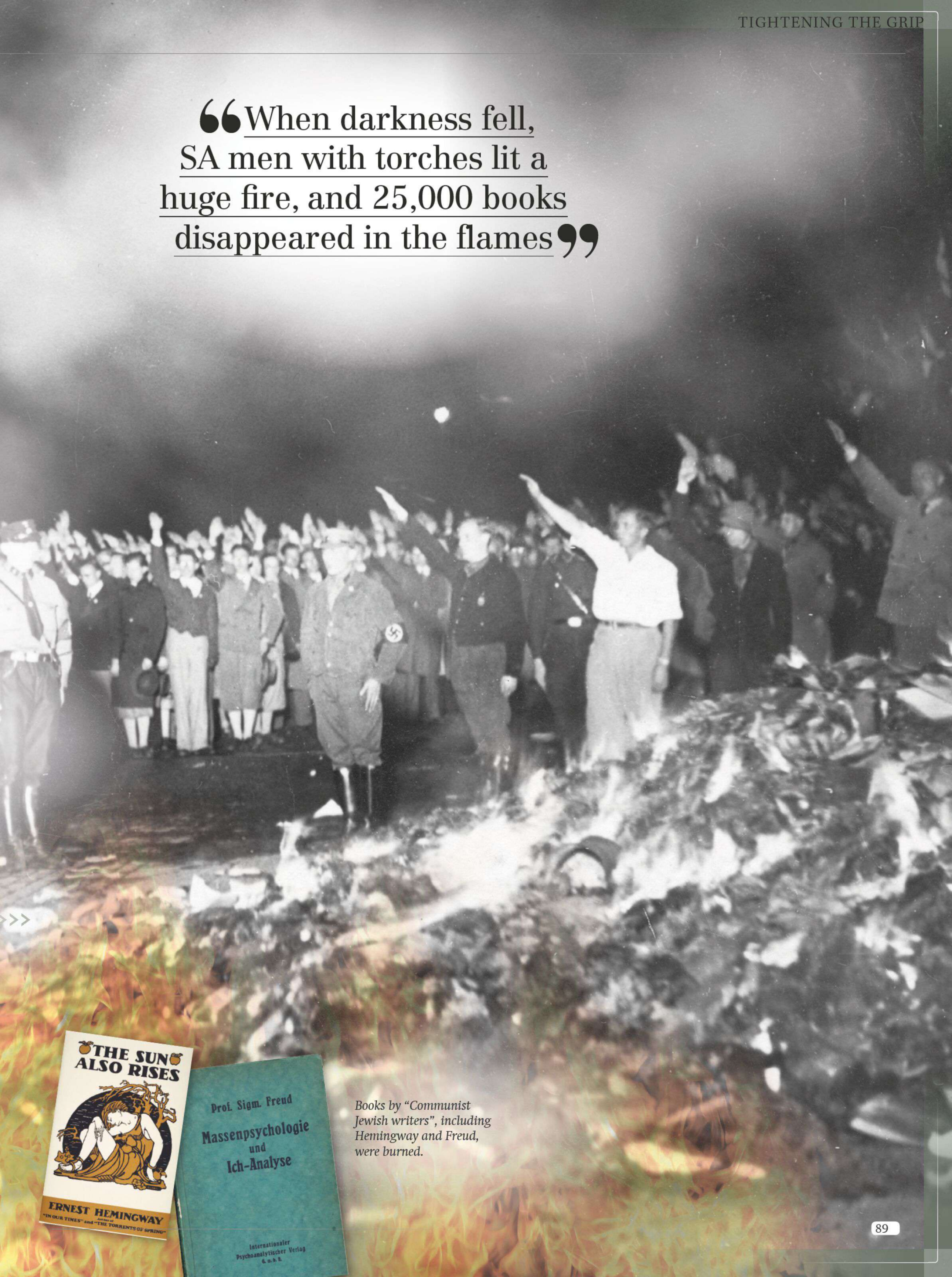
RICHARD KREBS / about the Gestapo HQ

THE BUILDING RESOUNDED OF CRIES OF TERROR



"Dirty corridors, simply furnished offices, threats, kicks, policemen chasing chained men around the building, cries of terror, rows of girls and women standing close to the wall, noses and toes pointing against the wall, ashtrays full to overflowing, portraits of Hitler and his helpers, the smell of coffee, smartly dressed women working at a high speed at typewriters – seemingly unaffected by the misery and pain around them, stacks of confiscated printing machines, books and pictures and Gestapo agents sleeping, leaning across their desks."

> “When darkness fell, SA men with torches lit a huge fire, and 25,000 books disappeared in the flames”



Books by “Communist Jewish writers”, including Hemingway and Freud, were burned.

licious Practices Act" in 1934, which made it a criminal offence to make statements that could undermine the people's trust in the Party. Now, Germans risked going to prison if they said that political prisoners were beaten in the concentration camps, that Hitler was an Austrian deserter, or that the Nazis oppressed the people's freedom.

"NO WORD IS SAFE ANYMORE"

Fear of the Gestapo's retaliatory measures soon put a damper on the people's desire to express their disapproval. In the pubs, where the working class had previously openly expressed their contempt for Hitler's regime, discussions died down.

"No letter, no telephone conversation, no word in the street is safe anymore. Everybody fears that the person you are talking to is an informant", literature professor Victor Klemperer wrote in his diary.

The Gestapo did what they could to sow fear in the population. The secret police regularly planted made-up articles in the newspapers about fictitious people who had been caught, questioned and imprisoned. And, based on more or less invented charges, they summoned Germans for questioning every day. The Gestapo most often refrained from violence and instead called in SS thugs to handle the corporal part of the questioning. The Communist Richard Krebs became familiar with this tactic when he was arrested in Hamburg and taken to the Gestapo offices.

For several weeks, SS interrogators beat up and whipped the Communist to get information about the hiding places of other Communists. Between questioning sessions, Krebs was chained in a narrow cell, cut off from all contact with his surroundings. He still refused to give information about his friends and their activities.

Therefore, he was taken to the Gestapo headquarters in Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse 8, where, in Richard Krebs' words, the methods changed. For some time, the primitive violence was gone – instead, the Gestapo let him stand or kneel in uncomfortable positions for hours and deprived him of every opportunity to sleep. Still without success. The Gestapo therefore arrested Krebs' wife, who had returned to Germany after a period in exile, and threatened to subject her to the same treatment. The thre-



The public "weapons searches" were to humiliate Jews, who followed the so-called Shulchan Aruch laws from the 1500s. Among other things, Jews are forbidden to cut or shave their beards.



Although the majority of benches in the city were reserved to Aryans, a few were for Jews only.



Every day, the Gestapo and the SS gathered Jews and forced them to remove dirt from house walls or streets. The washings soon became public crowd-pullers.



From 1933, the Nazis started boycotting Jewish shops, which were daubed with anti-Semitic graffiti. This graffiti – sarcastically – wishes the shopowner a good holiday in the Dachau concentration camp.

ats against his wife softened Krebs up.

Richard Krebs agreed to work as a Gestapo agent and was set free, but the secret police kept his wife as a hostage. Nevertheless, Krebs decided to flee to the USA soon after his release. Shortly after, his wife died in Nazi custody.

BLOCK GUARDS' EYES EVERYWHERE

Some of the reports to Gestapo came from the so-called "blockwarter" – block leaders who kept an eye on the locals on behalf of the Nazi Party. In 1935, Gestapo had contact with at least 200,000 block leaders who kept up to 50 residences under surveillance. Before the war broke out, all housing estates or blocks of flats had a block guard who, in addition to informing, spread propaganda and monitored how often the residents went to Nazi meetings and parades.

While the block guards usually had a reason to report a fellow citizen to the Gestapo, the situation was different to the ordinary German. Reports to the Gestapo were often driven by personal motives rather than ideological conviction. Neighbour disputes could lead to a report, business owners would report competitors, or employees would report colleagues who were a risk to their promotion.

The Germans started to use humour to vent their dissatisfaction. Not least in private.

In future", was a common joke, "teeth will be pulled out through the nose in Germany, as no one is allowed to open the mouth any more". Others talked about "the German glance", when two friends met in the street and started to talk. A series of quick glances over the shoulders made sure that no one was within earshot.

> "The aim was to cleanse the German race of unwanted elements and threats"

TIGHTENING THE GRIP

In February 1936, Hitler approved a new course for the Gestapo. After three years in power, the regime had quashed the resistance of Communists and Social Democrats. Instead, the Gestapo's main aim was to cleanse the German race of unwanted elements.

SAME TIME IN BRITAIN

PROTESTS AGAINST NAZISM INTENSIFIED

While the Nazis intensified their hunt for Jews, protests abroad increased – especially in Britain. Already from 1933, demonstrators regularly gathered in from of the Prime Minister's residence in 10 Downing Street to put pressure on the British government and call for a boycott of German goods. The boycott was to be a response to the Nazis' boycott of Jewish shops.





"I am the biggest pig in the city", the woman's sign reads. Her relationship with a Jew was in violation of Nazi racial laws.



Third Reich newspapers overflowed with stories about the blood-sucking Jews, who, for instance, ate little German children.

> “Homosexuality was considered degenerate and perverted”

In the concentration camps, political prisoners were now accompanied by habitual offenders, sex offenders and so-called anti-social elements such as beggars, gypsies, prostitutes, pimps and tramps. Even unemployed people were detained based on the belief that, in Nazi Germany, lack of work was non-existent. People without jobs therefore had to be “lazy work-shy elements who needed correction”.

Also German homosexuals, whom the Nazis considered to be degenerate and perverted, were affected by the new course. The Nazis only paid little attention to lesbian women, but struck hard on gays. Hitler raged against the gays: They undermined the Aryan race and was a disgrace to the Nazi male ideal.

The Gestapo set up a department for “the homosexual problem”, and the number of cases exploded. During the first three years of the regime, 4,000 men had been sentenced for homosexual activities. From 1936 to 1938 this number increased fivefold to 22,000 men. When the gays had served their official sentence and were released from the ordinary prisons, the Gestapo would be waiting for them in the street, arrest them and send them to an uncertain destiny in the concentration camps.

400,000
people were forcibly sterilised in Nazi schemes.

Germany to be cleansed of Jews

The oppression of gays, gypsies, anti-social elements, disabled people and other groups had the purpose of ridding the German society of unnecessary economic burdens, and not least to refine the German race.

The persecution of another minority, however, had a different purpose from the beginning. The Jews made up less than one per cent of the population, but Hitler found that they were part of a global conspiracy that would destroy Germany and the Nazi values.

The Nazi top did not want random persecutions, but looked to systematically force the Jews out of the Third Reich. On 15 September 1935, Hitler and Göring presented a new set of acts at a party meeting in Nuremberg. In future, Jews were not allowed to marry non-Jews or engage in a relationship with an Aryan woman. The last publicly employed Jews were fired. The Jews were banned from theatres, cinemas, exhibitions and other cultural events. Their children were expelled from the schools.

The German Jews were therefore forced to establish a parallel society with their own schools, associations and cultural institutions, but were still subject to restrictions. For example, Jewish theatres were not allowed to perform works by great German artists like Wagner, Goethe or Beethoven.

The creation of parallel societies was perfect in the eyes of the Nazi top, as they ensured complete separation between the Jews and the rest of Germany.

Mass flight from Nazi Germany

The more than 30,000 existing marriages between Jews and Aryans were a special challenge to the regime in the wake of the Nuremberg acts, and the Gestapo put pressure on the Aryan spouses in the subsequent years, typically the women. In a major campaign, the police called in women in mixed marriages for a friendly talk:

“Why does a beautiful blond German woman like you want to be married to a Jew? Life would be much easier if you divorced”, the Gestapo would suggest.

Promises and threats walked hand in hand. The women were told that a divorce would give their children bright career opportunities and ensure them classification as Germans. If they stayed in the marriage, the children would live as outcasts.

The Jews felt the tightening grip of the regime, but no one could foresee the fate for

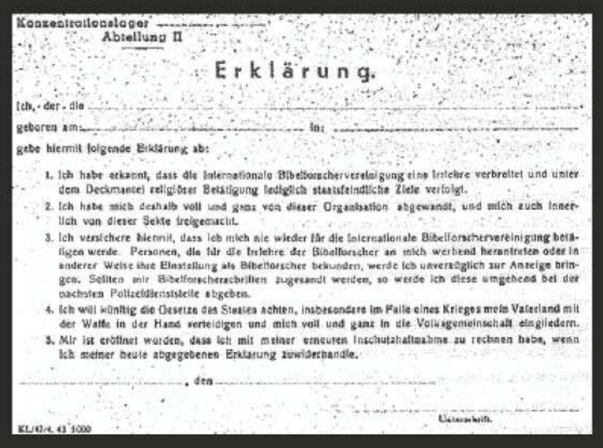
DISABLED PEOPLE ENDED UP IN CONCENTRATION CAMPS

The Nazis’ persecution of Jews is described in great detail, but many other minorities fell victim of the persecution too. Hitler was morbidly obsessed with the idea of growing a strong and healthy German people – and removing “defect” genes that would infect the German race with impure blood. Therefore, disabled people were forcibly sterilised or sent to concentration camps.

DISABLED PEOPLE: In 1933, the Nazis passed a new act which prescribed forcible sterilisation of people suffering from hereditary epilepsy, blindness, deafness, schizophrenia, manic-depressive psychosis, severe physical deformities or strong dependence on alcohol. More than 360,000 people were sterilised. Toward the end of the 1930s, the regime decided to also use disabled people as forced labour in the concentration camps.



GYPSIES: An act from 1938 banned gypsies from travelling in large groups. Public employees visited German gypsy groups that had to obtain permits to get marriied. Many gypsies were classified as anti-social and arrested.



Konzentrationslager
Abteilung II

Erklärung.

Ich, - der - die

geboren am in:

gebe hiermit folgende Erklärung ab:

1. Ich habe erkannt, dass die Internationale Bibelforschervereinigung eine Irrlehre verbreitet und unter dem Deckmantel religiöser Betätigung lediglich staatsfeindliche Ziele verfolgt.
2. Ich habe mich deshalb voll und ganz von dieser Organisation abgewandt, und mich auch innerlich von dieser Sekte freigemacht.
3. Ich versichere hiermit, dass ich mich nie wieder für die Internationale Bibelforschervereinigung betätigen werde. Personen, die für die Irrlehre der Bibelforscher an mich werbend herantreten oder in anderer Weise ihre Einstellung als Bibelforscher bekunden, werde ich unverzüglich zur Anzeige bringen. Sollten mir Bibelforscherschriften zugesandt werden, so werde ich diese umgehend bei der nächsten Polizeidienststelle abgeben.
4. Ich will künftig die Gesetze des Staates achten, insbesondere im Falle eines Krieges mein Vaterland mit der Waffe in der Hand verteidigen und mich voll und ganz in die Volksgemeinschaft eingliedern.
5. Mir ist eröffnet worden, dass ich mit meiner erneuten Inschutzhaftnahme zu rechnen habe, wenn ich meiner heute abgegebenen Erklärung zuwiderhandle.

, den

Unterschrift.

KL/10/4. 43 3000

JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES: The almost 30,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses in Germany ended up in concentration camps. By renouncing their faith, they could get out. Almost 1,000 of them lost their lives in the harsh camps.

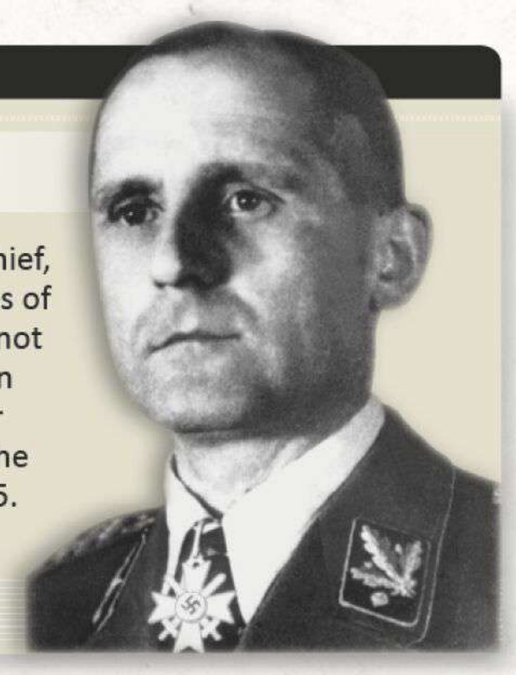


HOMOSEXUALS: Homosexual behaviour was illegal – especially among men. Gays were imprisoned or detained in concentration camps, and several thousands of homosexuals were threatened into letting themselves be castrated in order to heal their “degeneration”.

HEINRICH MÜLLER *1900-1945*

THE GESTAPO'S DEDICATED HUNTING DOG

■ Heinrich Müller, with the nickname Gestapo-Müller, served as the operational chief of the Gestapo from 1936, and in 1939, he became the commander-in-chief for all 20,000 employees in the secret police. Müller came from a Catholic working-class family in Munich, was a highly decorated pilot in World War I, and after the war, made a career for himself as a policeman in Bavaria. He considered his job a calling and obeyed orders without question. His deep hatred of Communism just made him even better as operational chief, where his most important job was to track down enemies of the regime. It was less important, then, that Müller was not a National Socialist and had once called Hitler an Austrian deserter and unemployed house painter. Heinrich Müller is one of the few top Nazis that were never found after the war. He was last seen in the Führerbunker on 1 May 1945. His subsequent fate is unknown.



Commander-in-chief in Bavaria – Operational chief of the Gestapo – Disappeared after the war

those who stayed. In spite of the discrimination, Holocaust was still far away. The regime tried to get rid of the Jews by supporting their wish to emigrate.

Most of them moved to other European countries, and more than 50,000 emigrated to Palestine. With Hitler's support, Jewish movements in Germany and Palestine concluded the Haavara agreement with the Nazi regime.

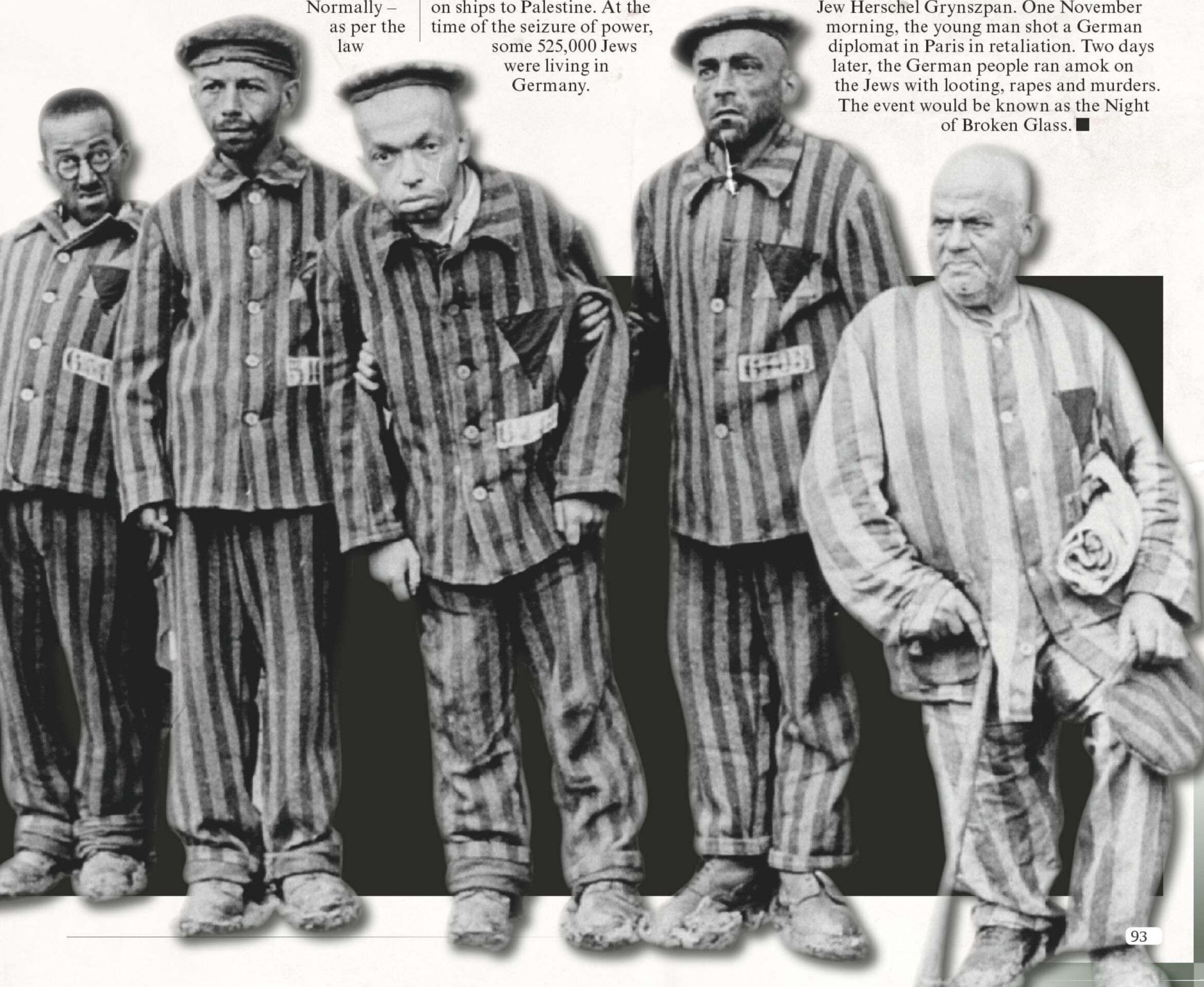
Normally – as per the law – Jews had to leave most their belongings when leaving the country, but the new agreement entitled the Jews to take most of their valuables with them if they emigrated to Palestine. The reasoning was clear:

The farther away the Jews went from Germany, the better!

The wish to cleanse Germany of Jews grew so strong that the Gestapo even helped the emigrants by organising transport on ships to Palestine. At the time of the seizure of power, some 525,000 Jews were living in Germany. Six years later, more than half had left the country.

MOB VIOLENCE AGAINST JEWS

Up until 1938, the German Jews were frozen out of the society, yet still lived a tolerable life. In the autumn of 1938, the Gestapo began to deport thousands of Jews to the border area near Poland, including the family of 17-year-old Polish-German Jew Herschel Grynszpan. One November morning, the young man shot a German diplomat in Paris in retaliation. Two days later, the German people ran amok on the Jews with looting, rapes and murders. The event would be known as the Night of Broken Glass. ■



Hitler headed the procession of Olympics dignitaries as they marched into Berlin's newly built pride of a stadium.

1936

1ST AUGUST

OLYMPIC PROPAGANDA SHOW

OLYMPICS EXPLOITED FOR PROPAGANDA

Hitler is not a fan of sport, but realises the propaganda value of the Olympics, so pulls out all the stops to show off Nazi Germany to the world. Athletes, spectators and journalists from around the globe buy the story and report enthusiastically about the happy summer days in Berlin.

Henri de Baillet-Latour

Adolf Hitler

Theodor Lewald

Berlin, 1936

THE STAGE IS SET

Hitler's Nazi party controls Germany with an iron fist. Jewish persecutions are part of everyday life and rearmament causes other European countries to fear the Führer's motives. The Olympics in Berlin provides Hitler with an opportunity to paint a rosy picture of Nazi Germany as a peaceful and righteous society.



THE OPENING OF THE OLYMPIC GAMES had surpassed all expectations. "They seem likely to accomplish what the rulers of Germany have frankly desired from them, that is, to give the world a new viewpoint from which to regard the Third Reich". So wrote *New York Times* journalist Frederick Birchall of the opening of the Olympics in Berlin on 1st August, 1936.

The spectacle had overwhelmed reporters. Young male and female athletes from many nations and sporting different skin tones marched into the newly built stadium under waving flags and past Hitler's gaze. When the last of 3,956 athletes from a total of 49 nations had come into the stadium, Hitler came to the microphone. Gone was the Führer's usual harsh tone and sharp rhetoric. Now the dictator spoke in a subdued and formal tone:

"I proclaim open the Olympic Games of Berlin, celebrating the Eleventh Olympiad of the modern era", he said as a flock of white doves were released and flew toward the leaden sky.

At the end of the formal opening runner Siegfried Eifrig lit the Olympic flame, and Hitler was presented with an olive branch as a gift from Greece, home to the ancient Games. As he stood between doves and olive branches, no one could have known that the dictator had originally expressed his deepest contempt for the Olympic Games.

Berlin was scrubbed clean

Berlin won the bid to host the games in 1931, and Hitler inherited the mantle after taking power in January 1933. But the role of Olympic host didn't appeal to him. He felt that the Games and its ideals of people and noble competition were "an invention of Jews and Freemasons" and "could not be tolerated in a Reich ruled by the National Socialists".

Sport certainly played an important role in Nazi society, and the area had its own minister, SA Colonel Hans von Tschammer und Osten. The purpose of it was preparation for war – or as propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels put it:

"German sport has only one task: to strengthen the character of the German people, imbuing it with the fighting spirit and steadfast camaraderie necessary in the struggle for its existence".

Gradually Hitler developed second thoughts. He knew that much of the world viewed him and the Nazi party with

"There will be no discrimination in Berlin against Jews"

Frederick W Rubien, US Olympic Committee member, 1935



On the way through a rainy Berlin, the Olympic flame was accompanied by an escort of runners.

NAME JESSE OWENS

TITLE TOP ATHLETE

1913-1980

Black runner was the Games' star

With four gold medals in the 100 metres, 200 metres, 4 x 100 metres and long jump, American Jesse Owens was the superstar of the Berlin Olympics. Even before his arrival, Owens was a big name, and throughout his stay in Germany he needed a bodyguard, because girls could not leave the handsome black athlete in peace.

Contrary to popular belief, Hitler didn't specifically refuse to shake hands with Owens. On the first day, the dictator shook the hands of every German winner, but organisers asked Hitler to greet everyone or nobody. He chose the latter. Owens was also able to follow his white teammates anywhere in Germany, something he couldn't do back in the US. At a reception at the Waldorf Astoria in New York, Owens wasn't permitted to use the main entrance, but had to arrive via a freight elevator.

- **Was bitter that President Roosevelt never congratulated him.**
- **Ended sports career because of financial problems.**



scepticism. At the Olympics, where the capital would have the world's attention, he could make Germany appear as it really was or – rather – as Hitler wanted the world to perceive it. With great enthusiasm the dictator and his advisers created a backdrop that would show a squeaky-clean, open and peaceful Germany. Before the Games started, an important goal had already been realised when the US Olympic Committee in December 1935 decided not to boycott.

Hitler's Germany was notorious for Jewish persecution – an unpleasant fact that neither the magnificent autobahn-building programme nor an impressive economic recovery could persuade the world to forget. The International Olympic Committee was therefore aware that Jews and non-whites were discriminated against: and not without reason.

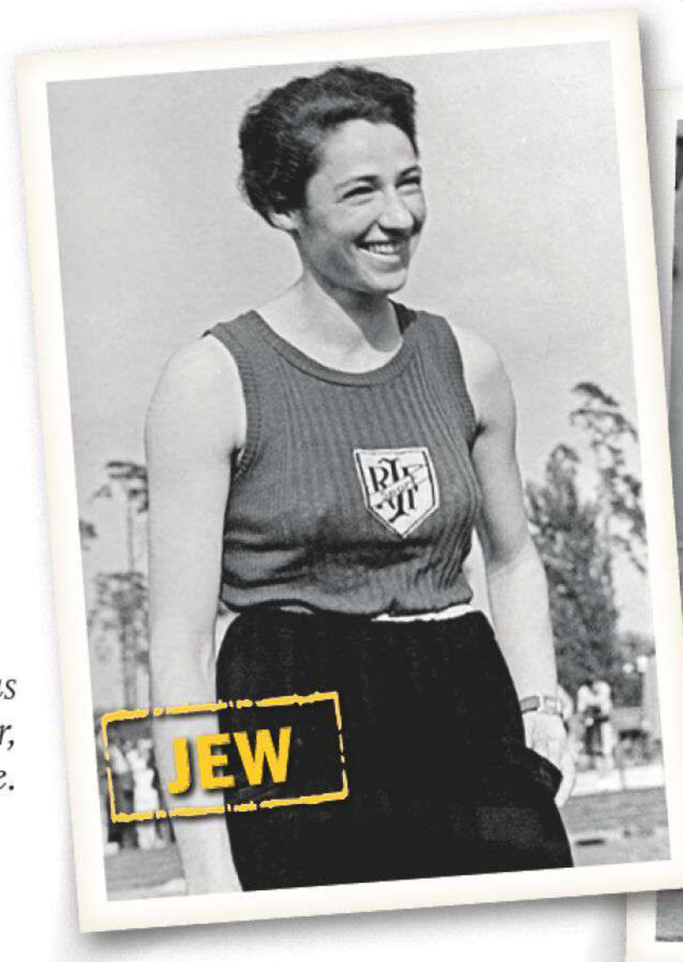
Hitler had already excluded Jews from German sports clubs and public swimming pools, prompting many Jewish talents to either give up or continue their careers abroad. The development was of particular concern to the US, who had the largest Olympic team.

"The very foundation of the modern Olympic revival will be undermined if individual countries are allowed to restrict participation by reason of class, creed, or race", stated Avery Brundage, President of the US Olympic Committee.

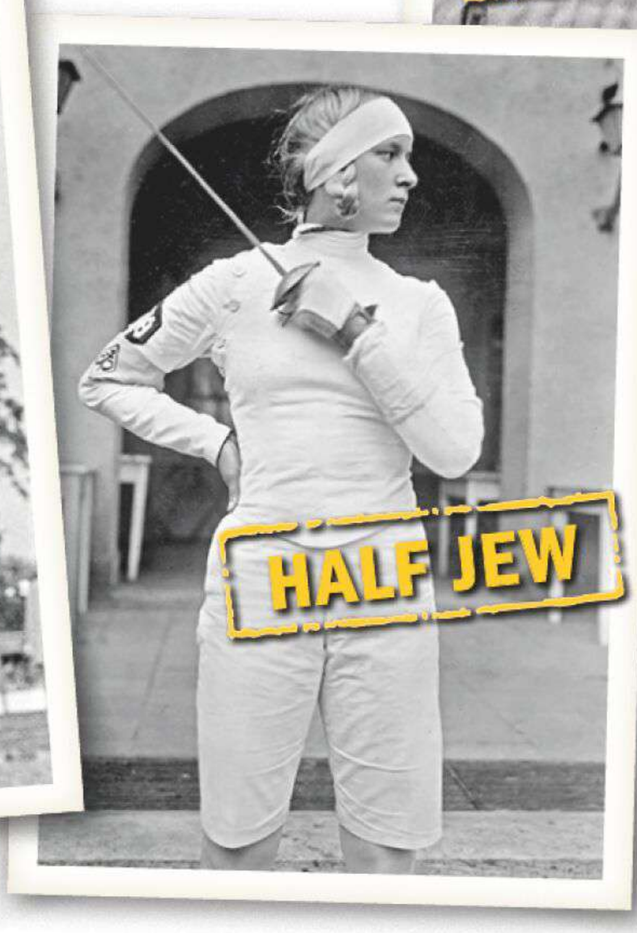
When Brundage had visited Germany in 1934, the situation had been covered up by Nazi representatives, so he concluded that Jewish athletes were treated fairly, and that a boycott was unnecessary. Sports and politics should be kept separate and American athletes should refrain from interfering in "the present Jew-Nazi altercation" as Brundage described it.

Jewish high jumper was excluded

Things were different in the Third Reich, as the Nazis kept a fine balance between outwardly keeping the façade in place while inwardly continuing to stubbornly exclude Jewish athletes. To avoid foreign criticism, Nazis tried



Jewish Gretel Bergmann was Germany's best high jumper, but was not allowed to compete.



Helene Mayer's father was a Jew. Yet she became a symbol of the new Germany.



German Dora Ratjen competed in the women's high jump, even though she was a man.

SPORTS ARENA

Sports stadium to impress the world

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, plans for Berlin's Olympic stadium were already well underway, but Hitler scrapped all the blueprints to erect the monumental Reichssportfeld instead.

Berlin was chosen to host the Olympics in 1916, but World War I got in the way, and the newly-built stadium was never used. In 1931, Berlin was again chosen as the host city, and the German government planned to simply rebuild the existing stadium.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, all plans changed. On an inspection tour of the construction site the Führer realised the potential for a world event like the Olympics. The Nazis had a unique opportunity to give the outside world a new vision of the country. Hitler decided to build a facility that was larger and more impressive than anything the world had seen so far. The result was the huge sports complex Reichssportfeld, which according to Hitler would last for 1,000 years.

FACTS

NEW PARK SURPASSED ALL

- Area: 1.32 square kilometres
- Stadium capacity: 110,000
- Number of employees: 2,064
- Chief Architect: Werner March
- Estimated cost: 27 million mark*

**Approximately £240,000,000 present value*



Nazi top brass watched from a specially built balcony for dignitaries.



The stadium "heiled" excitedly as soon as a German competitor performed well.



– among other things – to get Jewish high jumper Gretel Bergmann to attempt to qualify for the German team.

Bergmann, who had settled in England, was brought home by her father in 1934, who had been told by the regime that she had to represent Germany. The authorities had made it clear to her father that the family would be punished, and Bergmann later remarked: "In Germany then a hint was enough. You did what you were told or else".

Bergmann returned to Germany, where, with a jump of 1.60 metres she beat the national record. The performance however, was too much for the Nazis. The powers that be struck Bergmann's result from the records and said that she was not good enough to participate in the Games.

Instead of Bergmann, Dora Ratjen took part in the women's high jump and finished in fourth place. It was only later – in 1938 – that Ratjen was discovered to be male. In the meantime, Nazi preparations for the Games saw a superficial change of attitude towards Jewish guests. The anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*, which usually appeared on shelves all over Berlin, was temporarily closed and Berliners were warned that "Jewish athletes will be received the same as others". Also signs reading "No Jews or dogs allowed" that hung in parks and public places were hidden until after the Games.

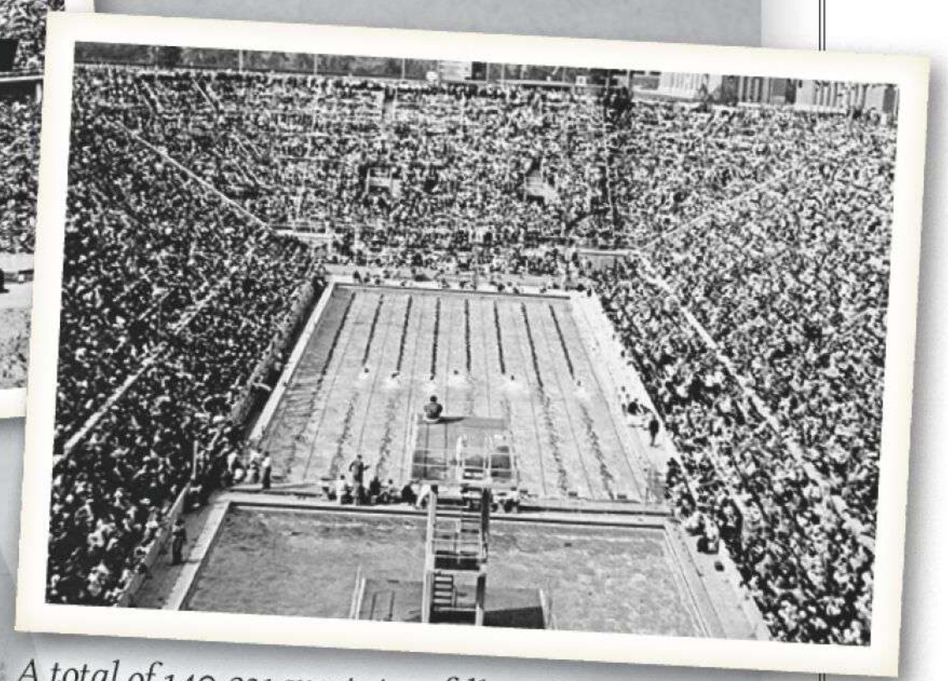
To be sure that all this courtesy was not misconstrued, the authorities added that "the fundamental attitude of the German people towards Judaism remains unchanged".

The Nazis created a picture postcard

Meanwhile, the streets and roads were decorated. Abandoned buildings were rented out cheaply and residents were given strict orders to keep their front gardens weed-free and clear of rubbish. Similarly, local leaders warned that all major streets



The Olympic flame burned in a modern torch throughout the 16 days.



A total of 140,231 spectators followed swimming competitions in the 50-metre-long by 20-metre-wide pool.

Olympic installations

Marathon Gate
The marathon was completed when the runners came in through the gate, which was also used as the entrance for Hitler's arrival; above the gate burned the Olympic flame.

Swimming stadium

Tennis courts

Hockey field

Sports field
112,000 square metres of grassy area for gymnastic performances.

Stadium

Olympic square

Olympic gate
52 turnstiles led the audience into the stadium. Today the gate leads to football club Hertha Berlin's home ground.



In 1935, Germany began producing Olympic badges. About 700,000 were sold.

Coubertin Square
Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics, was honoured with a small square.

S-Bahn
Just south of the site was S-Bahn Station, later renamed the Olympia Station.

should remain clean and tidy. Unsavoury people were also removed: prostitutes were arrested, beggars moved on and Romani folk placed in a special gypsy camp. Prisoners were sent to places where they could not be seen while inmates in concentration camps, who had yet to be exterminated, were held indoors instead of working as slave labour in the fields, as they were used to.

The image of this hospitable Germany was accompanied by good conditions for the competitors. At previous Olympic Games athletes had stayed in miserable surroundings – at best, hastily built barracks near the stadium, but typically they were referred to cheap and filthy hotels. Four years earlier, Los Angeles had experimented with offering athletes accommodation in a purpose-built city near the stadium. "The village" as the area was called, contained residential property and services like a post office, police station and a small cinema. The innovation was praised, and in 1936 the Nazis refined the concept near the village of Elstal

"The organising ability of the German nation has never been so palpably in evidence"

Daily Express, 1st August, 1936



Although Hitler refused to shake hands with the winners at the Olympic Stadium, he saluted individual gold medal winners, including British rower Jack Beresford. In Berlin Beresford won a medal for the fifth Olympics in a row, a record that stood for 60 years.

outside the city. Wehrmacht soldiers led by Captain Wolfgang Fürstner moved tonnes of sand and mud to level the ground and exterminated all the mosquitoes in the damp area.

Fürstner was perfect for propaganda. In addition to owning an Iron Cross 1st Class for his efforts during World War I, he was also half Jewish. Hitler was keen to show that his Germany did not discriminate by race, but was a meritocracy, so he chose Fürstner to represent the Olympic village.

Hitler was unable to carry off the scam completely, however. In mid-June, after about 370,000 people including the press had admired the village, Fürstner was relegated to second in command. The demotion was allegedly due to the captain's failure to meet the needs of the visitors to the village.

Fürstner put a good face until three days after the end of the Olympics. After he had been awarded the Olympic medal 1st Class and commemorated his successor at a sumptuous banquet, he shot himself. So the propaganda victory was not undermined, the Nazis claimed that Fürstner had died in an accident and buried him with full military honours at the Invalids' Cemetery.

Success came home

The Nazi bluff appeared to work, and the Games were a great success. The 16 summer days in Berlin featured several notable accomplishments – among the most memorable was American top athlete Jesse Owens. Owens, who was born into a family of poor farm workers in the southern state of Alabama, was met in Germany with an almost hysterical adulation. The excitement reached new heights on 3rd August, when the American won gold in the 100 metres. Owens ran, "so it looked as if the other runners were walking", one commentator said.

Hitler was less impressed. "The Americans should be ashamed of themselves, letting Negroes win their medals for them", he stated according to Baldur von Schirach. And Albert Speer remembered Hitler stating that "people whose antecedents came from the jungle" had a stronger physique and should be excluded from future Games.

The public did not hear the leader's racist comments, and outwardly Hitler appeared completely humane. Every day he sat along with other Nazi top brass at the stadium and smiled at the winners. The image wasn't even destroyed when the Nazis flexed their military muscle: on 13th August the hosts dished up a military parade at the stadium. To the tones of Wagner, soldiers from all three services goose-stepped across the arena.

Three days later five cannon shots rang from the stadium and the scoreboard proclaimed: "The last shot is fired". Hitler's goal had been achieved – with 16 grand days of propaganda he had seduced the world.

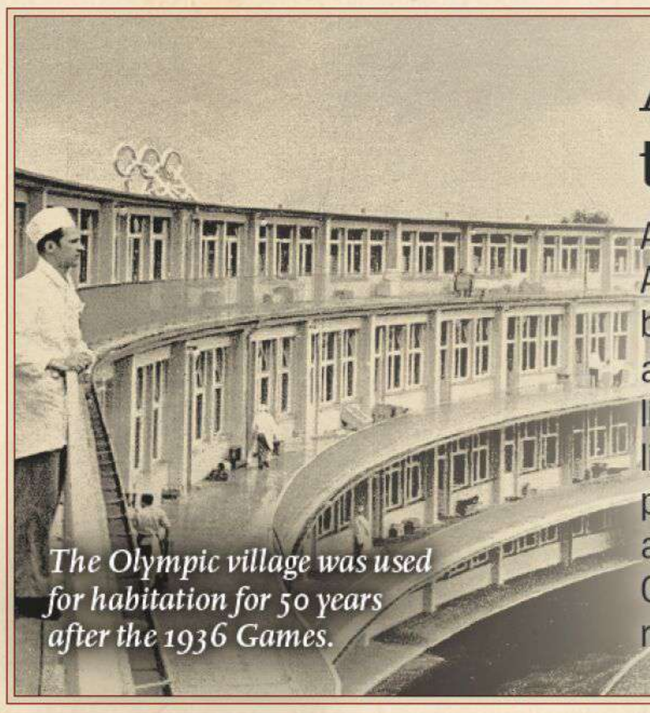
"I think it was bad taste to criticise the 'man of the hour' in another country"

Jesse Owens about Hitler in an interview after returning to the US in the newspaper *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 24th August, 1936

Hitler's Olympics led the way

The Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936 was a magnificent sports event, and several innovations continued in subsequent Games. The war meant that the world had to wait 12 years for the next Olympics which were held in London in 1948 – and Germany was excluded from taking part.

Athletes lived in the village

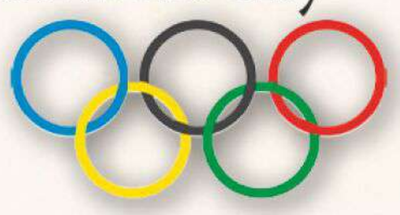


The Olympic village was used for habitation for 50 years after the 1936 Games.

At the Olympics in 1932 in Los Angeles male athletes stayed in barracks, which were demolished afterwards. In Berlin all competitors lived in real houses and had facilities like a hospital, sauna and swimming pool available to them. The buildings are dilapidated today, but Jesse Owens' room is renovated and remains as it was when he used it.

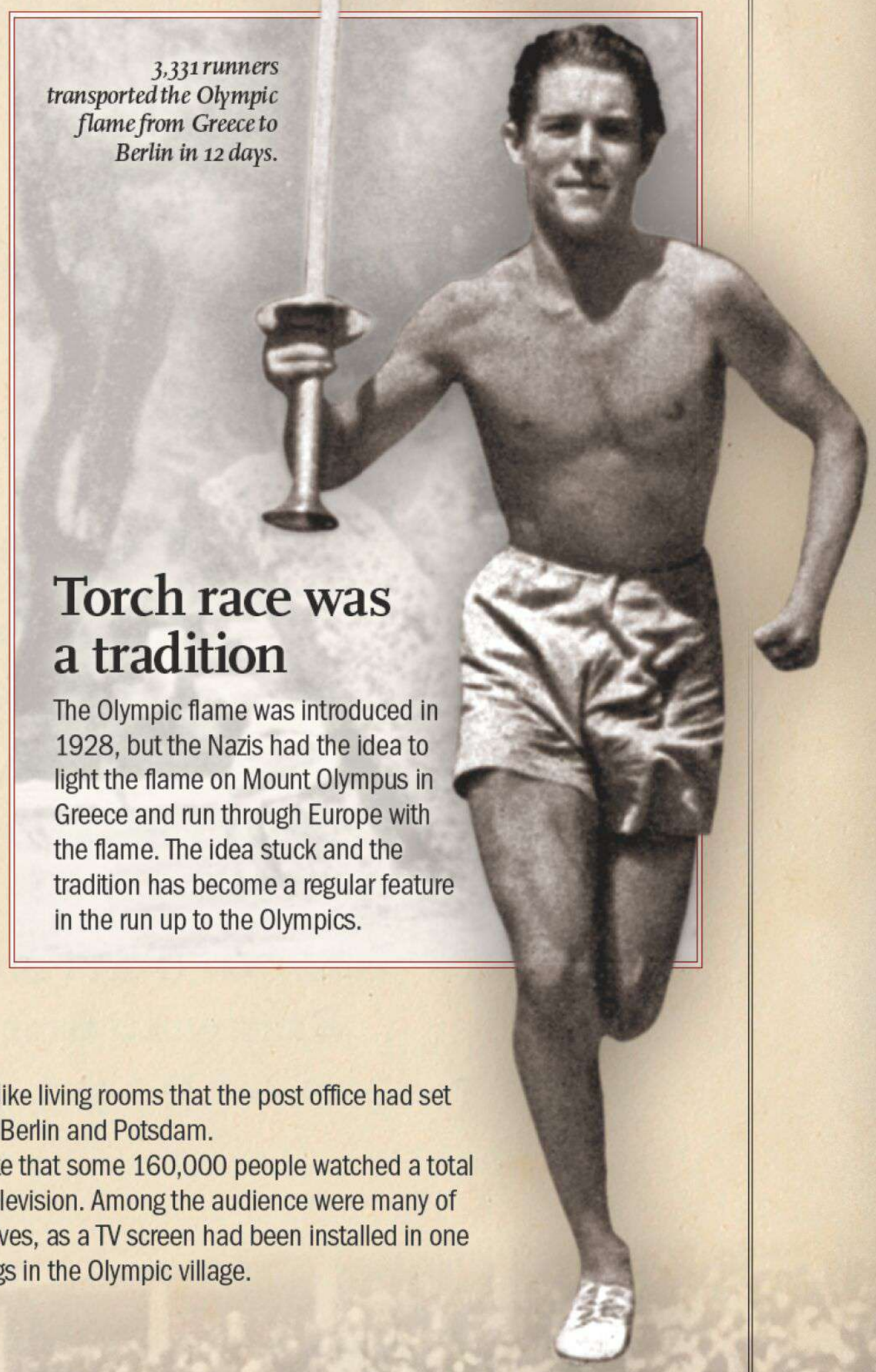
Committee voted on host city

Prior to 1932 the International Olympic Committee negotiated the host city, but in 1936 the selection was made after a vote by IOC members. Berlin's competitor, Barcelona, received 16 votes to the winner's 43.



The Olympic rings were designed in 1912 by Pierre de Coubertin and were used in 1936.

3,331 runners transported the Olympic flame from Greece to Berlin in 12 days.



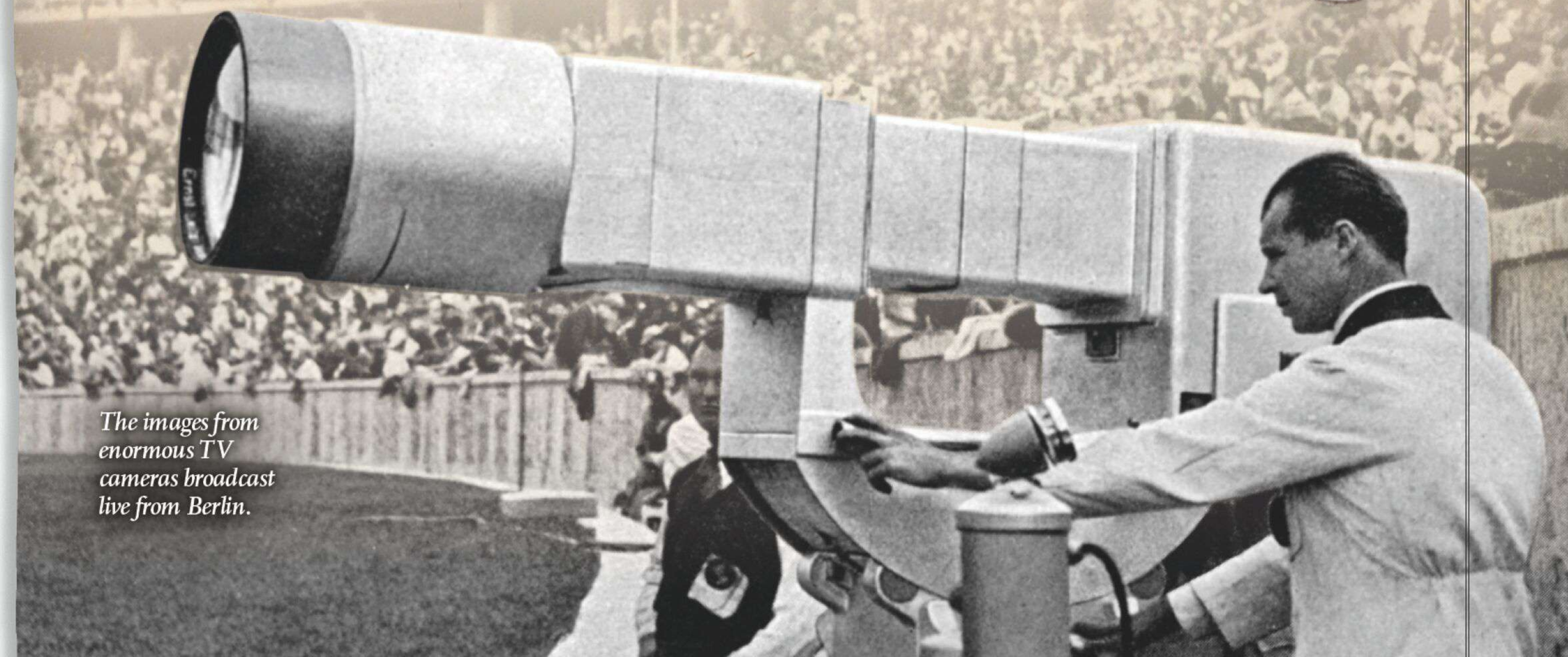
Torch race was a tradition

The Olympic flame was introduced in 1928, but the Nazis had the idea to light the flame on Mount Olympus in Greece and run through Europe with the flame. The idea stuck and the tradition has become a regular feature in the run up to the Olympics.

Sports' transmission was a world first

The Olympics in Berlin were the first live television sports event ever. The cameras at the Reichssportsfeld captured disciplines, and direct images were beamed via a transmitter in the suburbs of Witzleben close to the Games. Two special cables connected to the sports radio tower in Berlin. The image quality was slightly rough and unclear, but despite the weak signal TV viewers flocked to the small theatre-like living rooms that the post office had set up in the suburbs of Berlin and Potsdam.

Historians estimate that some 160,000 people watched a total of 72 hours of live television. Among the audience were many of the athletes themselves, as a TV screen had been installed in one of the public buildings in the Olympic village.



The images from enormous TV cameras broadcast live from Berlin.



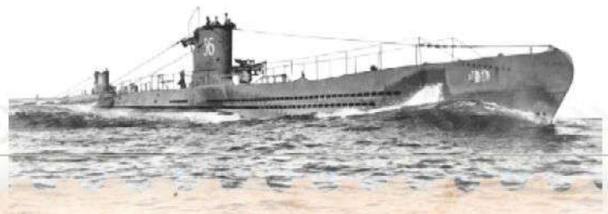


READY FOR WAR

1933-1939

When Hitler came to power, the Treaty of Versailles had put limitations on Germany's army for 15 years. The Führer's ultimate goal was to create the most efficient war machine in Europe. He commenced intense rearmament, created an air force that would become the most feared in Europe and slowly began to annex old German areas to his Reich. After six years in power, Hitler ordered his army to the Polish border. And on 1 September 1939, the Austrian upstart threw the world into the most devastating war in history.

1933-39



1933 Hitler commences secret rearmament in all services.

1934 In one year, the army doubles in size to 240,000 men.

1935 Germany reintroduces military service.

1935 Britain allows the German fleet to rearm to 35% of the size of the British fleet.

1939 German troops invade Poland, starting World War II.



1933 1934 1935 1939

On 3 February 1933 – just four days after Hitler had been appointed Chancellor – he invited the most senior generals of the Reichswehr to dinner in Berlin. The generals were flattered by the newly-appointed Chancellor's invitation, yet cautious about the short former Austrian who was now trying to act like a statesman.

After a light dinner, Hitler immediately began to outline his visions for the German army: The Wehrmacht was to be rebuilt to a proud war machine, Marxism was to be eradicated, and the chains of the humiliating Treaty of Versailles were to be broken. Most importantly, Hitler wanted to conquer new Lebensraum for his people to the east. These areas were to be emptied of its present inhabitants, and Nazi colonists were to settle there.

The plans seemed unrealistic, but the generals fell for the words about rebuilding the German army. Since the defeat in World War I, the military had been amputated and faces severe restrictions, and the officers were itching to free themselves from the shackles of the Treaty of Versailles. In fact, the army top had been circumventing the World War I peace agreement for years.

As early as in 1923, they had, in deep secrecy, made the plans for the future German military. They had also started the development of planes and tanks through agreements with the German arms manufacturer Krupp. In secrecy, the arms factory had sent experts to Sweden to develop prototypes and invent possible weapons. Actual arms production was impossible, however, because it could not be undertaken in secret. Instead, the army talked 1,000 German manufacturers into supporting them in 1928. The factories continued the work they had been doing so far, but ensured that they would be able to re-direct production to war equipment immediately at the threat of a new war. The Germans did not have one single fighter plane, but the army had hundreds of trained pilots who were training in one of the many sports pilot associations that just so happened to be created in the 1920s in Germany.

Reichswehr was the name of the German army. In 1935, Hitler changed the name to the Wehrmacht.

Hitler thunders against foreign countries

It was therefore a clearly weakened, but not completely destroyed, armament industry that Hitler took over in 1933. Not only did the new Chancellor decide to carry on with the rearmament in secrecy, he also intensified the training of soldiers, pilots and navy personnel and boosted the development of new types of planes and tanks. As his army grew, Hitler took the first steps on his way to an intransigent and aggressive foreign policy. At the disarmament conference held by the League of Nations in Geneva in 1933, the brusque Chancellor demanded a trebling of his army's size. In return, he promised peace with France. The memories from the World War and Hitler's aggressive rhetoric sparked concern among the members, and the proposal was rejected by the League. On 14 October 1933, the German officials therefore left the negotiations.

Shortly after, Hitler withdrew Germany from the League of Nations, a precursor of the UN. The dramatic step was welcomed in Nazi Germany, not least among the generals, who revelled in the strength that the action symbolised. The support from the army was decisive to Hitler.

Nazis create the Luftwaffe

Just one year after the seizure of power, the German army had more than doubled from the allowed 100,000 men to 240,000 soldiers. Having had conversations with, among others, the young general Heinz Guderian, Hitler realised the importance of having a powerful air force to support the armoured troops, and he therefore set

Hitler won the army's favour with his promise to rebuild the Reichswehr.



Soldiers from the Reichswehr in an exercise in 1926. The "tanks" are made from canvas and wood and mounted on a simple chassis to comply with the ban against tanks in the Treaty of Versailles.



German solders in light military vehicles in 1930. The ban against heavy vehicles frustrated the German supreme command.

NEIGHBOURING STATES CONQUERED IN FIVE YEARS

Using a combination of threats and sly foreign policy, Hitler secured major land areas before the outbreak of World War II.

In his book, "Mein Kampf", Adolf Hitler outlined his foreign policy demands. At the top of the list was the wish to annex German-speaking areas to this empire, without regard to the countries to which the areas belonged. Then, he would get Lebensraum for his people by conquering Czechoslovak, Polish and later, Russian territory. Soon after the seizure of power, Hitler set out to implement his ideas, and it was not until the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939 that the European superpowers tried to stop the German expansion.

MEMEL, 1939:
On 22 March, German troops occupy the area north of East Prussia. So far, Memel has been Lithuanian, but the population is mainly German-speaking.

THE SAAR DISTRICT, 1935:
In 1920, the League of Nations give France right of disposal of the area for 15 years. In January 1935, the population votes for their future nationality – 90.3 per cent want to return home to Germany. The annexation makes Hitler very popular in Germany.

THE SUDETENLAND, 1938:
Almost three million Germans live in the Czechoslovak area, which Hitler wants to incorporate into his growing empire. Hoping to avoid war, Britain and France accept Hitler's occupation of the Sudetenland.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1939:
Germany occupies the Czech Republic on 15 March. Slovakia is granted autonomy. The aggression makes France and Britain guarantee Poland's independence.

THE RHINELAND, 1936:
Since World War I, the area between Germany and France has been a demilitarised zone. When Hitler orders the German army into the area, France is entitled to strike back hard, according to the Treaty of Versailles, but there is no reaction. The occupation becomes a major political success for the Nazis.

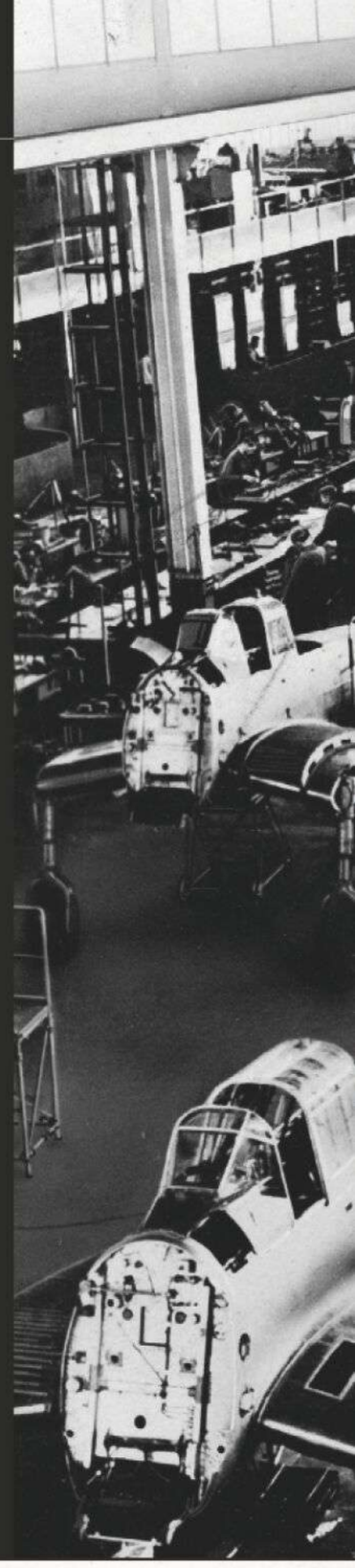
AUSTRIA, 1938:
After prolonged pressure, Austria's pro-Nazi Chancellor asks Germany to send troops to the country on 12 March. The soldiers are received as liberators, and three days later, Austria becomes part of the new Greater German Reich.



German troops marching into Austria near the border town of Kufstein.



In 1939, Germany's industry was fully geared towards military production. A total of 2,971 tanks had rolled off the conveyor belts in the factories since 1935.



On Göring's order, the Luftwaffe became the world's strongest air force. The backbone were Messerschmitt fighter planes and Stuka dive bombers (right) for ground targets.

>>>> up the Reich Air Ministry, which assumed full responsibility for the development and production of new planes. Shortly after, the National Socialist air force and several sports pilot associations were placed under the Ministry. This gave the Nazis control of all pilot training in Germany. The many pilots from the Nazi organisation were loyal party members – a guarantee for implicit obedience from the future air force. In February 1935, Hitler signed a confidential document authorising the creation of the Luftwaffe and appointed the pilot hero from World War I, Hermann Göring, head of the new force. Göring was merely a figure-head as his tactical knowledge was out-dated and his technical insight limited. Instead, young and promising officers prepared a tactical manifest which became the foundation of the Luftwaffe's successes during the war.



Right after the seizure of power, Hitler began to channel billions of Reichsmark into the German army. The financial means enabled a huge rearmament, and in just six years, the army grew from being insignificant to being one of the strongest ones in Europe.

THE GERMAN ARMY

	1933	1939
Soldiers	100,000	2,300,000
Tanks	0	2,971
Bombers	0	1,527
Fighter planes	0	1,229
Submarines	0	59
Warships	36	38
Cost (% of GDP)	2.7	18.1

Torpedo research in Sweden

Two months after the appointment of Göring, Hitler revealed the existence of the Luftwaffe to the foreign countries. He renamed the country's army the Wehrmacht and reintroduced compulsory military service. Although scattered protests reached Berlin – especially from France – none of the European superpowers decided to react to the clear violation of the Treaty of Versailles. Not even Britain, which actually concluded an agreement regarding the fleet with Nazi Germany shortly after. Until then, the German navy had been very limited, but now, it was allowed to rearm until its size was 35 per cent of the British.

Although Hitler wanted a strong fleet, the construction of new war ships was given low priority. The German Kriegsmarine had to accept that Hitler considered the army and Luftwaffe the most important services, and the long construction time on battle cruisers and aircraft carriers would prevent him from building an effective fleet before the war came. Only the number of submarines grew considerably. Before the agreement with Britain was signed, Germany had been banned from having submarines, but a design office had already been set up in the Netherlands, and a German torpedo research programme was well under way in Sweden. Expertise from these programmes enabled Germany to create a submarine fleet before the start of the war.

Attacks on tractors

On 7 March 1936, Hitler ordered the Wehrmacht to march into the Rhineland at the French-German border. The occupation was completed with caution. The German soldiers went on foot or drove on so-called tractors – simple full-track vehicles without armour and firepower. The army was ready to turn around at the slightest resistance from the French. To the surprise of the general staff, the sorry occupation force met no resistance. The population greeted the soldiers with cheers, and the cities of Cologne and Düsseldorf once again came under German rule. The French government had its doubts about the German invasion, while the British thought that the Germans "had simply occupied their own backyard", and found no reason to protest.

For the first time since World War I, Germany had completed a military action. The occupation was a huge personal success for Hitler, who was praised by the Germans and recognised by the general staff for his courage.

In front of hundreds of thousands of enthusiastic attendants on the party day in Nuremberg in September 1936, Hitler revealed his plans for the Third Reich. Over the next four years, the economy was to be



geared for war, the Führer thundered. Only in that way could Germany avoid being swallowed up by Soviet Bolshevism.

"I therefore set the following task: In four years, the German army must be ready, and within four years, the economy must be prepared to endure a war".

The Führer's words soon turned into action. Hitler launched a series of projects to make Germany self-sufficient on all fronts to avoid a repetition of World War I, when the German population was starved to surrender. Using imported American expert knowledge, Hitler constructed huge industrial plants to produce synthetic rubber, textiles and oil. At the Hermann Göring plants, workers produced tons of steel.

Hitler removes the generals

Hitler had only one confrontation left before his Nazi Reich was ready for war: The confrontation with the elitist Prussian upper class which held the officer positions in the army. Their visions were outdated, Hitler believed, and he feared a military coup. Instead, the supreme command was to be manned with young, skilled officers who were blindly loyal to the Führer.

On 5 November 1937, Hitler summoned the supreme command to the Hossbach meeting. He made it clear that the demand for Lebensraum to the east was a pre-requisite for Germany's existence. Predatory wars against small neighbouring states like Czechoslovakia and Poland were to secure the State finances in the time leading up to a major war, and in 1941, France was to be crushed to prevent war on two fronts, before the attack on the Soviet Union, which was to crush the Communist threat.

Hitler had also prepared detailed tactical plans, including a method to avoid the feared war on two fronts through a German surprise attack on Czechoslovakia, while the army stayed on the defensive in the west. He rounded off his speech by concluding that Czechoslovakia could be conquered as early as 1938. Even to the supreme command, the aggressive plans were unrealistic, and Hitler's ideas were met with severe protests. The lack of consent convinced Hitler that the supreme command had to be removed.

Shortly after, accusations of homosexuality among the leading generals surfaced. Heinrich Himmler had false evidence produced, and as a result, the Führer replaced large parts of the Wehrmacht's leadership by loyal generals. The power over the Wehrmacht had been cemented, and nobody in the German army dared challenge the Führer.

Having gained full control over the army, Hitler began to work toward the goals he had described in "Mein Kampf". At the top of the list was the ambition to annex the German-speaking populations in the neighbouring states to the fatherland. After several schemes, Hitler managed to install a Nazi federal chancellor, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, in Austria in 1938. Soon after his appointment, the Hitler-friendly Chancellor sent a request to Germany to station troops in the country to protect it from civil war.

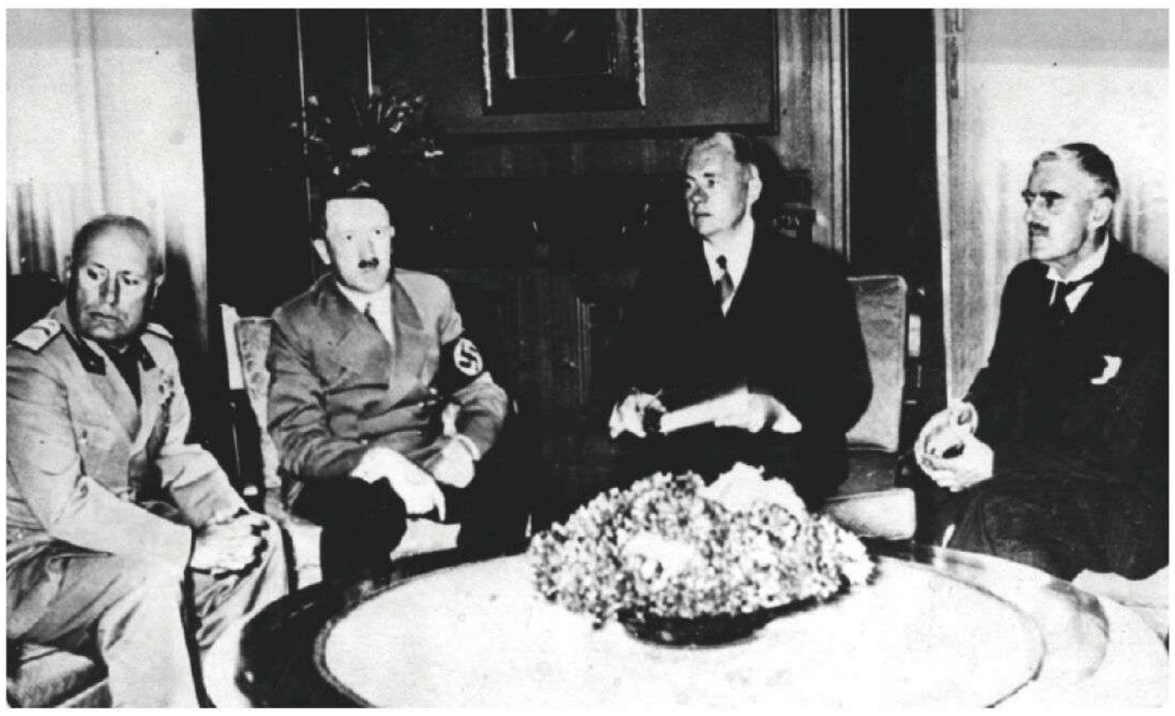
So on 12 March 1938, the Wehrmacht crossed the border to Austria. The invasion met no resistance – on the contrary.

SAME TIME IN FRANCE



FRANCE REARMS TOO LATE

In the 1920s, France was one of the world's leading developers of state-of-the-art war materials, but when the financial crisis hit in 1929, the country's military budget was reduced significantly, and the country soon lost its leading position. The French realised too late that Hitler's Germany was developing military technology which was far superior to the French. Production did not increase until the summer of 1938, when the French Aviaion Ministry began to pour money into the armament industry. But it was too late. Two years later, the modern German army crushed their French counterparts in just six weeks.



The leaders of Europe discuss the future of Czechoslovakia in Munich. From left: Italy's Benito Mussolini, Adolf Hitler, French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier and Neville Chamberlain. No Czechoslovak representatives were at the meeting.



The British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returns to cheering crowds in London. In his hand he is holding the document with Hitler's signature, which, according to Chamberlain, ensures "peace in our time".

>>>> Everywhere, the Austrians cheered at the "liberators", who were received with flowers. The press called the invasion the "Blumenkrieg" – the Flower War. Hitler drove his car into Austria near Branau, his native town. The next three days were a triumph for the Führer, who was praised all the way to Vienna, where he declared Austria part of the Third Reich.

Czechoslovakia partitioned

In May 1938, Hitler turned his eyes to the eastern neighbour, Czechoslovakia. The border area toward Germany – called the Sudetenland – was home to 3.5 million German-speaking people whom the Führer wanted "back" in the Reich. Based on false accusations about Czechoslovak suppression and persecution of the German minority, Hitler threatened with war to save "his people".

The threat was real. Hitler put the German army on the alert, and Europe avoided a new war only because of France and Britain's policy of appeasement. The two superpowers concluded an agreement according to which Czechoslovakia agreed to surrender the parts of the Sudetenland where more than half of the population spoke German. This seemingly very generous agreement turned out to be insufficient to Hitler. If the Czechs did not leave the Sudetenland before 1 October 1938, Nazi Germany would take the area by force, he thundered. Although Hitler did not doubt that the Wehrmacht was able to win an impending war, the rhetoric stirred unrest among officers and generals. The supreme command estimated that Germany was not yet strong enough to go to war against the Western Powers. The hesitations made Hitler scale down his war rhetoric, but he maintained his demands. In September 1938, the Führer met with the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, in the idyllic Berchtesgaden in Bavaria. Here, he was promised that the Sudetenland would remain German, provided that he guaranteed a stop to territorial demands and peace in Europe. Shortly after, the French Prime Minister, Édouard Daladier, also signed the agreement. Thus, the three men shared Czechoslovakia without discussing the issue with a single Czechoslovak representative.

950,000
soldiers were in the Polish army in 1939. Hitler used more than 1.5m men in the attack on the country.

The Western Powers therefore accepted – and Czechoslovakia protested – when, on 1 October 1938, German troops marched into the Sudetenland. To Hitler, the negotiations were a massive success. In addition to the pro-German inhabitants, the area boasted important raw materials and modern arms factories. Also, the Czechoslovak army's heavy defences were placed along the border to Germany. They now disappeared into the Nazi Reich, and the border to the rest of Czechoslovakia was completely open.

The war hits Europe

Hitler had guaranteed to stop his aggressive foreign policy; but on 15 March 1939, German troops advanced and conquered the rest of Czechoslovakia without resistance. France and Britain protested strongly, but the Czechs themselves had given up, and the invasion ensured Hitler the important Skoda factories with some of the most advanced military technology of the time.

In March 1939, the German political pressure for Lebensraum switched to Poland, where Hitler demanded that the free city of Danzig be given back to Germany. A huge mobilisation took place, and up to 1.5 million German soldiers approached the border by train. A new major war seemed inevitable, as France and Britain had guaranteed Poland's independence, and the Soviet Union, too, seemed determined to stop Germany. In an atmosphere of mistrust, Stalin conducted secret negotiations with Hitler in August 1939. On 23 August, a foreign policy bomb fell when Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact. Now, Germany was free to advance into the western part of Poland without risking a war on two fronts.

On 1 September 1939, Adolf Hitler let his army loose on Poland. Two days later, the UK and France declared war on Germany. 20 years after Hitler had trudged into a meeting in the Nazi Party, he had thrown the world into a new World War. ■

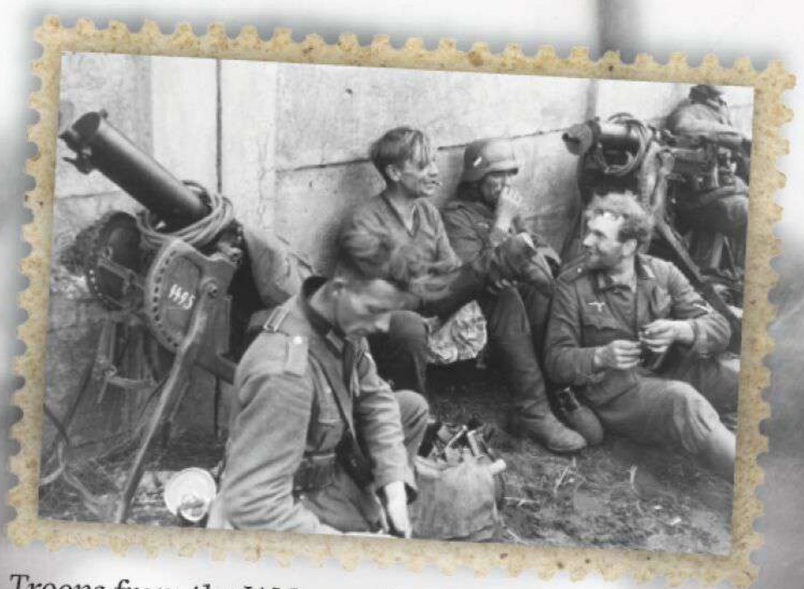


TECHNICA | CULTURE | ECONOMY | DAILY LIFE

Dive bomber inefficient

As early as 1939, German engineers started developing Ju 87, which became feared all over Europe as the Stuka. The test phase lasted four years, during which engineers tried to solve the problem of recovering the plane after the steep dive. The solution was to install stronger engines and reinforce the airframe, so that it could stand the air drag diving towards enemies at a furious speed. Despite its reputation, the dive bomber was not particularly efficient in the battle field and an easy target for hostile pilots.

“On 1 September 1939, Adolf Hitler set his army loose on Poland”



Troops from the Wehrmacht having a break after fights in Poland. After five weeks, all resistance had been crushed.

From the beginning of the war, the Germans decided to terrorise the civilian population. Here, a Stuka attack has cost a Polish girl her life in a field outside Warsaw.

German troops set buildings on fire as they passed through Poland to intimidate the population into surrendering.

1939

1ST SEPTEMBER

INVASION OF POLAND

GERMAN TROOPS ATTACK POLAND

Adolf Hitler decides to raise the stakes and invade Poland. It's imperative the country is overcome as quickly as possible before the western European powers of Britain and France can intervene. But the campaign doesn't progress according to the Führer's plan.

THE STAGE IS SET



Hitler wants to subjugate Eastern Europe to create Lebensraum (space to live) for Germans. He's already taken Austria and Czechoslovakia and it's now Poland's turn. The country's army is not the most modern, but Poland has guarantees of support from both France and Britain. Even so, Hitler decides to take a chance.

THE GERMAN BATTLESHIP *SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN* trained its huge guns on the sandy peninsula of Westerplatte on the Polish Baltic coast near the port city of Gdansk at dawn on 1st September, 1939. At 04.48, eight shells thundered towards the southeast corner of the city's garrison, leaving three large holes in its outside wall and setting oil warehouses alight.

A few minutes later, three elite divisions of German marines attacked, but came up against surprisingly stiff resistance from 205 Polish defenders. At 06.22, the infantry's radio operator frantically informed the battleship that they were falling back due to heavy losses. Two and a half hours later the marines tried again, reinforced by another 60 soldiers. They occupied the garrison's ruined outer wall, but faced a lethal mix of mines, fallen trees, barbed wire and heavy Polish gunfire. At midday, the demoralised SS soldiers and marines whose commander had been severely injured conceded defeat. By the end of the first day, 82 Germans were dead, and the garrison had still not been captured.

The Germans finally occupied it after a week of dogged fighting, thanks to the support of a torpedo boat and 60 aircraft, which dropped over 100 bombs. On 7th September at 09.45, exhausted Polish defenders finally hoisted the white flag.



Polish military cap from 1939. The Polish Army was unprepared for war.

The picture was mirrored across the Front. Poles defended doggedly, even though on paper the Germans were superior. The invasion force consisted of two infantry groups of 882,000 and 630,000 men respectively, attacking from north, west and south. The German Army was modern and well-drilled; by contrast, the Polish units had only been called up at the last minute.

Hitler had expected a swift victory, but the Poles staunch defence was potentially dangerous to the Führer's grand design. The jokers in the pack were Britain and France, the two major victors of World War I. If his army became bogged down in a protracted campaign in Poland, Germany's west flank would be left exposed. Should Britain and France go immediately on the attack, they might end Hitler's campaign before it began.

WESTERN POWERS WERE RULED BY FEARFUL MEN

Hitler was confident this wouldn't happen, however. At the Munich Conference in 1938, he'd demanded that Czechoslovakia cede the predominantly German-speaking Sudetenland to Germany, and both French and British prime ministers – Édouard Daladier and Neville Chamberlain – had yielded to his claim. Their capitulation convinced Hitler that France and Britain were ruled by frightened men he could bluff and manipulate.

Hitler saw no reason to put a damper on his territorial claims. In March 1939, he laid claim to the rest of the Czech territory – Bohemia and Moravia – and converted the Slovak part of the former Czechoslovakia into a German puppet state with free passage for German troops.

His aggression tightened a serious noose around Poland, which was now surrounded by German troops on three sides. An attack would give the Führer the opportunity to take revenge for World War I, when Germany was forced to cede land to Poland, including the carbon-rich Upper



Polen überfallen den Gleiwitzer Sender

Aufständische überschritten die deutsche Grenze — Kämpfe mit deutscher Polizei

dnb. Breslau, 31. August.

Etwa um 20 Uhr heute abend wurde der Sender Gleiwitz durch einen polnischen Überfall besetzt. Die Polen drangen mit Gewalt in den Senderaum ein. Es gelang ihnen, einen polnischen Aufruf in polnischer und zum Teil deutscher Sprache zu verlesen. Sie wurden aber schon nach wenigen Minuten von der Polizei überwältigt, die von Gleiwitzer Rundfunkhörern alarmiert worden war. Die Polizei mußte von der Waffe Gebrauch machen, wobei es auf seiten der Eindringlinge Tote gegeben hat.

dnb Oppeln, 31. August.

Über die Vorgänge in Gleiwitz wird noch folgendes bekannt:

Der Überfall auf den Sender war offensichtlich das Signal zu einem allgemeinen Angriff polnischer Freischärler auf deutsches Gebiet. Etwa zur gleichen Zeit haben polnische Aufständische, wie bisher festgestellt werden konnte, an zwei weiteren Stellen die deutsche Grenze überschritten. Es handelte sich wieder um schwerbewaffnete Abteilungen, die anscheinend von regulären polnischen Truppenteilen unterstützt werden.

Abteilungen der im Grenzdienst stehenden Sicherheitspolizei haben sich den Eindring-

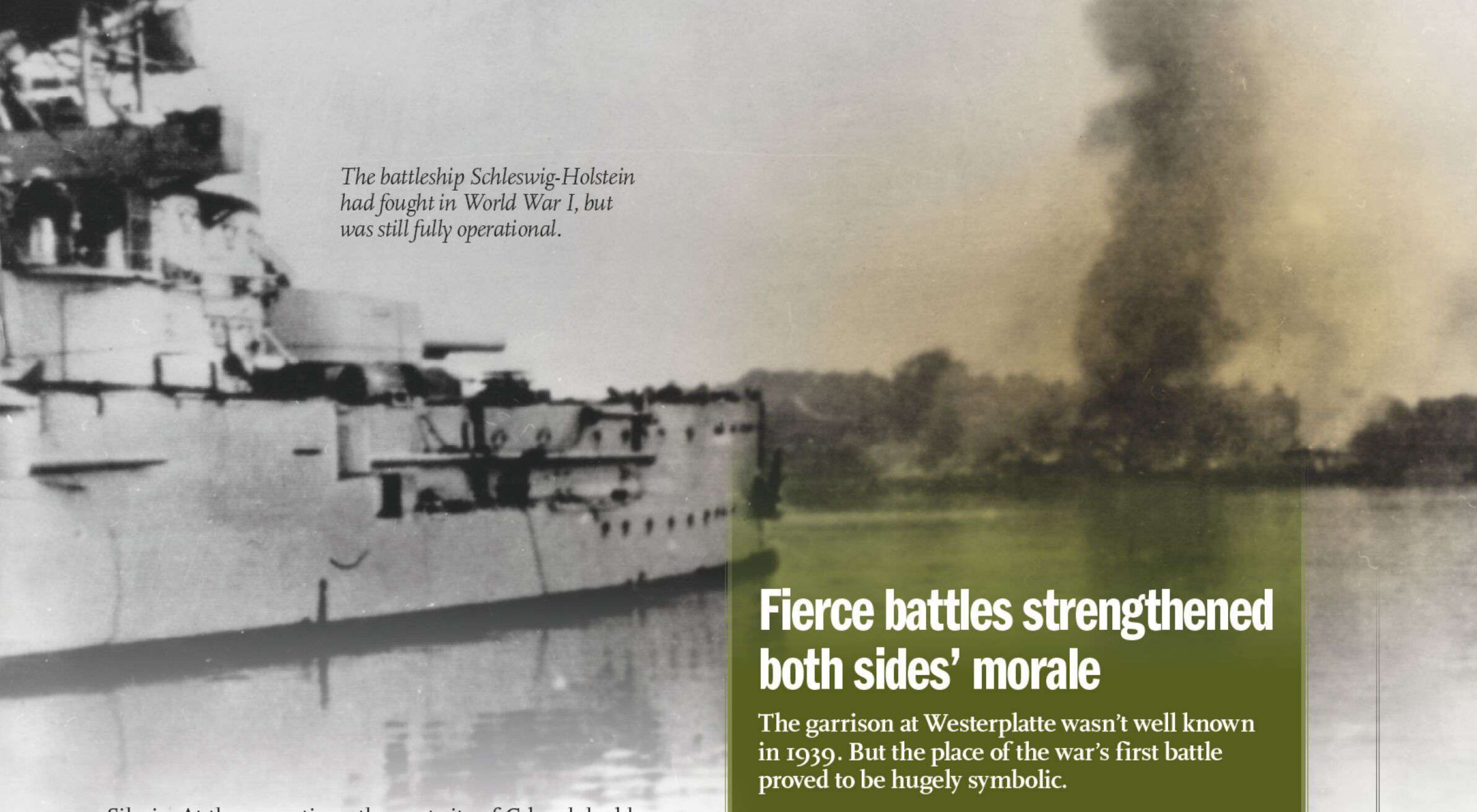
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Litauen in jedem Fall streng neutral

Kowno, 31. August.

The Gleiwitz radio station's high masts meant its broadcasts could be heard over most of Europe.

The SS conducted a fake attack on the radio station at Gleiwitz to give Hitler a pretext to attack Poland.



The battleship Schleswig-Holstein had fought in World War I, but was still fully operational.

Silesia. At the same time, the port city of Gdansk had been a haven administered by the League of Nations (forerunner to the UN). But above all, Poland possessed the so-called Polish Corridor – an area of land that gave Poland access to the Baltic Sea by separating the Germany from East Prussia. Many Germans viewed this division as an extreme humiliation.

In addition to its desire to win back lost territory, Nazi racial ideology dictated that Germany had a right to "Lebensraum" to the east of its borders at the expense of the Slavs, which it viewed as an inferior race.

During 1939, more signals of an impending attack appeared: on 22nd March, the Germans occupied the Lithuanian port city of Memel, which until 1919 had been German. Hitler also demanded that Gdansk come back in to the German fold, so transport links could be built to span the Polish Corridor.

Guarantee made Hitler furious

The diplomatic row between Germany and Poland forced Britain to intervene. On 31st March in the House of Commons, Chamberlain proclaimed that Britain would support Polish independence and Gdansk's continued status as a free city. The British guarantee infuriated Hitler. At the same time, it was clear that Polish leaders would cede few – if any concessions – to Nazi Germany in the corridor, let alone voluntarily join the pro-German bloc. The Polish question would have to be resolved by military means.

Hitler had already ordered that his generals initiate a detailed plan of an attack on Poland, codenamed Fall Weiss (Operation White). Several commanders were sceptical, however, and thought that Hitler's scheme was too risky. They had good reason to be worried: in May 1939 Lieutenant General Tadeusz Kasprzycki, Poland's War Minister, travelled to Paris, where he signed the Kasprzycki-Gamelin Convention. This committed the French Army to launching a massive attack on Germany with 38 divisions within 15 days of Poland being attacked. Despite their scepticism, by spring 1939 Hitler believed the western European powers would not intervene. On the eve of war, Göring warned him not to play "va banque" (go for broke). "All my life I have played va banque", Hitler replied.

German military planners finished getting Fall Weiss ready on 15th June, 1939. The attack plan was straightforward: Army Group North comprising two armies would attack the northern part of Poland, while Army Group South's three armies would invade from the south. But there was still one factor that Hitler had to deal with: how would the mighty Soviet Union react to its common neighbour being invaded by Germany?

Joseph Stalin viewed Hitler's territorial designs on Europe with interest. The Soviet dictator harboured a desire to subjugate foreign nations, including the Baltics, parts of Finland, Bessarabia and eastern Poland. The areas had previously belonged to

1.4 million
German soldiers rolled into Poland, supported by 2,600 tanks and 2,000 aircraft. Against them stood 700,000 Polish soldiers with 750 tanks and 900 aircraft.

Fierce battles strengthened both sides' morale

The garrison at Westerplatte wasn't well known in 1939. But the place of the war's first battle proved to be hugely symbolic.

The Polish garrison on the Westerplatte peninsula proved far harder to defeat than German commanders had envisioned. On the other hand, victory proved symbolic for the invaders – while at the same time the dogged defence played a central role in Polish morale.

The capture of Westerplatte was so important that Hitler visited the place after the battle. The Führer inspected the ruins and also went aboard the battleship *Schleswig-Holstein*, which launched the bombardment.

For Polish soldiers across the country, the defence of Westerplatte gave them the faith to fight on. The garrison's heroics also left an impression on the Germans who allowed its commander, Major Henryk Sucharski, to keep his sword after surrendering.

Poles caught in deadly crossfire

Poland had Europe's fourth largest army in 1939. But its equipment was outdated and few soldiers had been mobilised when the Germans invaded. A difficult situation became impossible when the Soviet Union also attacked from the east.

1 Germany moves in

1st September: German troops invade Poland from the east (East Prussia), west (Germany) and south (Slovakia). The army makes gains everywhere despite significant losses.

2 Hitler takes to the Front

4th September: the campaign starts off smoothly, as the advance guard penetrates far into the country. Hitler has already visited near the front by 4th September.



Hitler felt safe enough to visit units near the Front in Poland.

3 Poles hit back

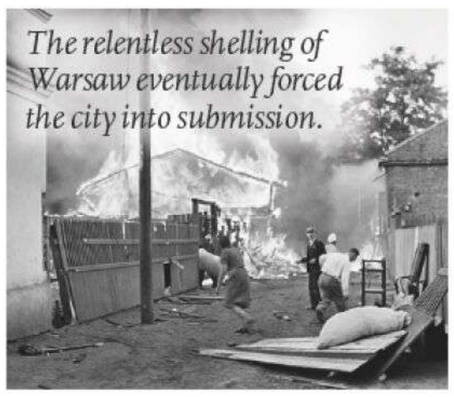
9th September: the Polish Army counterattacks by the River Bzura. It enjoys initial success before the Germans bring in further reinforcements and win the battle after 10 days.

4 Russia invades Poland from rear

17th September: Russians invade eastern Poland in agreement with the Germans. A two-front war is too much for the Poles, so Russian forces advance quickly and easily.

5 Capital must surrender

27th September: Warsaw falls. After intensive bombing from aircraft and artillery, the Polish capital surrenders. Much of the city is destroyed, and around 25,000 civilians have died.



The relentless shelling of Warsaw eventually forced the city into submission.

6 The Germans celebrate victory

6th October: the last Polish forces surrender, when the Battle of Kock ends. All of Poland is occupied by the Soviet Union and Germany. On 5th October, the Germans hold a victory parade in Warsaw.

Gulf of Finland
Estonia
Latvia
Memel
Lithuania
Baltic Sea
East Prussia
Soviet Union
Minsk
Polish Corridor
Westerplatte
Gdansk
Germany
Berlin
Warsaw
Kiev
Poland
Gleiwitz station
Bohemia and Moravia
Slovakia
Agreed border between Germany and the Soviet Union

The small Suwałki region was also annexed by Nazi Germany.

About 60 German divisions took part in the campaign against Poland, and panzer units particularly enjoyed easy successes over the flat territory.

the Russian Tsarist Empire, and Stalin saw them as a natural part of the Soviet Union.

The solution to both nations' craving to extend their boundaries was a mutual agreement. On 23rd August, 1939 the German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop got on a plane to Moscow. Early the next day Ribbentrop and his Soviet counterpart, Vyacheslav Molotov, signed the Treaty of Non-aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The two countries pledged neutrality in case of war with a third party, but the pact also included a secret protocol that allowed Eastern Europe to be divided between Soviet and German interests. Germany's included western Poland, while the Soviets claimed Finland and eastern Poland. The agreement gave Germany a free hand to conquer half of Poland without provoking the Soviet Union, while Stalin could subdue the former Russian territories.

With the pact in place, Hitler was ready to start his campaign against the east, and on 25th August the order came to attack the following day. But at the last moment, the Führer hesitated and revoked the order. The message did not reach all divisions and several Wehrmacht units made small inroads into Poland. At the last minute, Polish military command ordered a full mobilisation on 31st August.

Hitler's hesitation was partly because on 24th August, Neville Chamberlain promised British military assistance to Poland in the event of a German attack. But the delay also gave the Führer an opportunity to attach a pretext to the attack. If Hitler could claim that the Poles had made the first move, he had a weapon in the event of a propaganda war.

Farmer became war's first victim

On the evening of 31st August, 27-year-old SS Sturmbannführer Alfred Helmut Naujock led a handful of SS soldiers disguised as Poles to the radio station in Gleiwitz (now Gliwice), a small town in eastern Germany on the border with Poland. SS soldiers had no trouble penetrating the building where the radio station was located. The concierge had left his post, and the two police officers who normally guarded the place were otherwise occupied. In the transmitter room, the soldiers attacked the four men and led them handcuffed into the cellar. Then SS soldiers sent a radio message partially in Polish: "Achtung! This is Gleiwitz. The broadcasting station is now in Polish hands". The speaker referred to himself as a Polish freedom fighter and read an anti-German statement, ending with the words, "Long live Poland".

On the way out of the building, the SS soldiers passed a body on the ground. It was Franciszek Honiok, a local German farmer who was a known Polish sympathiser. In the morning, two Gestapo officers had arrested Honiok and during the raid on the radio station had drugged and then killed him. His body was supposed to be one of the Polish freedom fighters who had attacked the communication building on German soil.

The Gleiwitz incident was one of several organised events to demonstrate that armed Poles

1890-1986

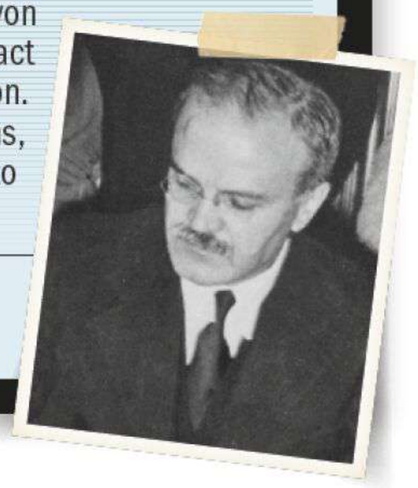
NAME **VYACHESLAV MOLOTOV**

TITLE POLITICIAN AND DIPLOMAT

Politician was demoted

Molotov was one of Stalin's closest men, and together with German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop signed the non-aggression pact between Germany and the Soviet Union. Molotov held several prominent positions, but fell out of favour and was demoted to Ambassador of Mongolia in 1957.

- Secretary of the Central Committee.
- Foreign Minister 1939-49, 1953-56.





PzKpfw II (Panzerkampfwagen II)

Weight	8.9 tonnes
Crew	3 men
Main armament	20 mm cannon
Top speed	40 km/h
Armour	5-14 mm
Number in 1939	1,223

CANNON SMASHED ARMOUR

PzKpfw II was armed with a 20 mm cannon, which could penetrate the armour on all contemporary Polish tanks. PzKpfw II was a big improvement over its predecessor, which had only two machine guns. Germans grouped the tanks into special panzer units that operated very efficiently.



7TPjw

Weight	9.9 tonnes
Crew	3 men
Main armament	37 mm cannon
Top speed	37 km/h
Armour	5-17 mm
Number in 1939	95

TANKS WERE OUTNUMBERED

In 1935, the Polish Army ordered its own version of Britain's "Vickers" tank. The first version, named 7TPjw, was the best Polish tank in 1939 and was superior to most German tanks. But the Poles didn't have enough of them to make a decisive difference in the war.



German troops met almost no resistance in places like Sopot when they crossed the border.

had invaded Germany: later that night, 30 SS men disguised as Polish soldiers attacked a customs station, while other SS divisions brought six prisoners from a concentration camp, killed them and left them in Polish Army uniforms near the border.

The next morning Hitler arrived at the Reichstag in Berlin. "This night for the first time Polish regular soldiers fired on our territory", he raged. "Since 05.45 we have been returning fire", the Führer added, despite the fact Germany had already launched its attack on Poland an hour earlier.

Poles went on the defensive

The German plan was to surround and then destroy the Polish army as fast as possible, allowing German troops to be redeployed west to counter any French offensive.

The Poles' plan, however, was to pursue a dilatory and defensive war to allow the country time to complete its delayed mobilisation and give the French and British an opportunity to attack the Germans from the west.

Unfortunately, not all the Polish units were prepared for a modern war. It was one of few countries to have maintained a large cavalry, which proved to be no match for the German war machine. On the first day of the invasion near Krojanty in the northern part of the country, a Polish cavalry regiment launched an attack on a German infantry unit. Suddenly, armoured vehicles burst out of a nearby forest to attack the regiment. Around 20 riders – including the commander – were killed before the remaining soldiers managed to turn their horses and escape.

Despite fierce resistance, in most places Polish troops were in retreat. German Stuka crash bombers posed a serious threat to both troops and civilians who fled in their thousands. From the beginning of the invasion, the Luftwaffe terrorised towns and villages. The idea was to wear the Poles down, so the country would be forced to surrender. Over the 40 days it took to conquer Poland, over 150,000 civilians were killed.

Despite the catastrophic situation, many Poles still clung on to hope for help from Britain and France, and they had something to hang their hopes on. In the evening of 1st September, Britain demanded the Germans halt the attack against Poland, withdrawing its troops immediately. But it gave no deadline. The French decided to wait two or three days before making its own formal declaration of war, partly to give its reserve forces the time to move into position. But after consulting with the French prime minister, on 2nd September Chamberlain decided to provide the Germans with a real ultimatum. The notice was to be conveyed by Nevile Henderson, Britain's German ambassador in Berlin, to German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop the following morning.



The Infantry Assault Badge was given to Waffen-SS and Wehrmacht soldiers after the campaign against Poland.

The Führer sat immobile

A little before 09.00 Henderson arrived at the State Department; however, Ribbentrop did not want to meet the ambassador personally. Instead, he sent his interpreter Paul Schmidt with Henderson while he drove to the Reich Chancellery. Schmidt and Henderson stood awkwardly in the middle of the Foreign Minister's office as the British ambassador read out the ultimatum: unless Germany had retreated from Polish territory by 11.00 the same day, "from that time a state of war will exist between Great Britain and Germany". Schmidt placed the ultimatum in his bag and rushed to the Reich Chancellery, where he verbally relayed its contents to Ribbentrop and Hitler, who was seated at his desk.

"When I finished, there was complete silence. Hitler sat immobile, gazing before him", said the interpreter in his memoirs. After a while, Hitler turned towards the Minister with a furious stare and asked, "What now?" Ribbentrop replied: "I assume that the French will hand over a similar

ultimatum within the next few hours". 20 minutes after the deadline Berlin responded to British demands. By then the British Government had already declared war on Germany. Six hours later, the French made a declaration of war too.

That same evening, the German dictator got into his private armoured train to visit the Front in Poland and was now worried about the prospect of a great European war, which he had initially hoped to avoid. Before the train departed, Hitler confided in his trusted propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, that he still believed that Britain and France would only conduct a "potato war", that is, an economic blockade of Germany and not an armed attack.

German pincers snapped shut

Things seemed to be going to plan for Hitler's troops in Poland. The Wehrmacht had already taken several towns, and in southwestern Poland German tanks crossed the River Warta. Despite declarations of war, the British and French governments seemed reluctant to intervene.

On 6th September, the Germans captured Kraków, and the same day the British military mission in Poland sent an ominous message home to London: "The two most dangerous [German] attacks at the moment from the motorised groups comes from Silesia and the forces moving southwards on Warsaw from East Prussia. Should these two arms of the pincer succeed in effecting a junction, a large portion of the old Polish Army might be surrounded". The situation looked disastrous for the Poles, and army commanders needed to find an urgent countermeasure.

The Polish Army's response came on 9th September, when a counteroffensive led by General Tadeusz Kutrzeba launched on the River Bzura, some 100 kilometres west of Warsaw. The general's goal was to disrupt the Germans' march towards the Polish capital, while reclaiming the cities of Leczyca and Piatek further south. At first, Kutrzeba benefited from a tailwind thanks to the Germans underestimating the size of the Polish forces. Poles entered Leczyca where fiery street battles developed, and after a series of attempts also managed to recapture Piatek.

On the way to the city they encountered a German company defending one of the roads. The German soldiers came under intense shelling and took cover in some World War I trenches. The company's commander Captain Christian Kinder subsequently wrote the book "Männer der Nordmark an der Bzura":

"In intervals of three to five minutes hand and rifle grenades landed in the Company's trenches. This section was shelled methodically and with surprising accuracy from the right side to the left side... Two men in close proximity to the Company were pierced with fine shrapnel and killed instantly... Each man literally felt now that the moment had come when the »



After the war, Ribbentrop was convicted of crimes against humanity and hanged.

1893-1946

NAME **JOACHIM VON RIBBENTROP**

TITLE FOREIGN MINISTER

Top Nazi pursued Jews throughout Europe

As a well-travelled businessman Joachim von Ribbentrop had a better knowledge of world politics than most other top Nazis. From enrolment in the Nazi Party in 1932, he dreamed of a career as Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs. Hitler first sent Ribbentrop to London as ambassador, but in 1938 his dream came true when the diplomat succeeded Konstantin von Neurath as head at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Ribbentrop's proudest moment came in 1939 when, together with his Soviet colleague Molotov, he signed a non-aggression pact between the two countries. Elsewhere, his role included helping to exterminate Jews in occupied countries, which was the main reason he was convicted after the war.

- **German Foreign Minister 1938-45.**
- **Convicted at the Nuremberg Trials and executed in 1946.**



Nine-year-old Ryszard Pajewski sitting in the ruins of what was once his home in Warsaw.

next hand grenade would hit him". Kinder was one of only a few men to survive the shelling.

The day after, two German infantry divisions pulled back in utter chaos. One officer reported to headquarters that the situation was "exceptionally serious" and begged for reinforcements. Kinder noted that some of his men who were "shaken by the enemy's superior strength began to prepare themselves for defeat". The German soldiers' fighting spirit was further weakened when Polish cavalry attacked them from the rear.

Polish communication failed

Shortly after, German High Command reacted by reorganising its forces. At the same time, Polish troops ran into trouble. The units had no air support, and in some places even had to advance without cover from artillery or proper communication, partly because their phone lines had been destroyed. Yet the Poles managed to advance for two days before the Germans beat them back during an attack on 11th September, where they recaptured several kilometres of territory. The following day, German troops regained the initiative as they now possessed four times as many tanks as the Poles.

560 tonnes
of explosives and 70 tonnes of fire bombs were dropped by the Luftwaffe over Warsaw during the final days of the campaign, turning the city in an inferno.

Now it was Kutrzeba's time to regroup, giving the Germans time to bring in reinforcements. On 16th September, a German motorised corps attacked from the east, and its panzer division broke through a Polish infantry division's defences. The manoeuvre left Kutrzeba's forces surrounded, and the Luftwaffe mercilessly attacked the trapped Polish troops.

Polish cavalryman Klemens Rudnicki was one of the lucky ones who fled with his squadron. But during the escape, the group was surrounded by Germans in a forested area. The Polish troops dismounted their horses and fought on the ground while enemy machine guns pounded against them, preventing any further flight. "Bullets buzzed like

wasps; the artillery began to respond; it was quite impossible to emerge from the forest", Rudnicki wrote later. It was only when darkness fell that the Polish cavalry managed to escape.

On 21st September, the Battle of Bzura ended. Two Polish armies had been destroyed and 100,000 soldiers taken into German captivity. The road to Warsaw was now open for the German main force to join the forward tank units that had already reached the city walls on 7th September.

In the following days, a trinity of tanks, artillery and aircraft attacked the Polish capital. A Polish officer, who participated in the defence of the Warsaw-Praga district, described the attacks in his diary on 10th September: "The nerves of all the people are still frayed from yesterday's shelling. All around us buildings are in ruins. The fire at Transfiguration hospital with its several hundred wounded was a ghastly business. I saw a soldier with both legs amputated crawling from the building on his elbows; other wounded jumped out of the windows onto the pavement. Five doctors and several nurses perished in the fire..."

In mid-September, Warsaw was completely surrounded by German forces demanding that the capital capitulate. But the commander of the city's defence stubbornly refused.

Doomed city would not give up

By late September 1939, the Polish capital resembled Armageddon. Human corpses and horse carcasses filled the streets, much of the city lay in ruins, and water pipes, electricity, hospitals and railway stations were destroyed. The survivors were starving, drinking water was running out, and doctors warned of the risk of disease.

The situation in Warsaw stemmed from Hitler's dissatisfaction that the city had not yet capitulated. As the city continued to hold out, the impatient Führer ordered the Luftwaffe to bomb relentlessly, which started on 24th September. On 25th September, 1,200 aircraft attacked the city. The crews bombed the capital's industrial estates and residential areas. The following day, the artillery arrived to join the shelling, while infantry stormed the condemned city as it burned.

On 27th September Warsaw gave up. 30,000 people were killed, but the bad news continued to mount for the beleaguered Poles. By 17th September, Stalin's Red Army had already crossed the Polish eastern border, and when Warsaw capitulated, Russian forces were at the line that Ribbentrop and Molotov had agreed. The two dictators were on the way to wiping the independent Polish nation off the map.

The Polish government had already fled to Romania, and on 6th October, the last forces surrendered. The army had suffered a loss of 70,000 dead and 133,000 wounded in battles with the German invaders, while another 50,000 had fallen in fighting the Red Army. In comparison, the Germans reported losses of just 11,000 dead and 30,000 wounded.

So far, the German Führer was winning his high-risk war games: he'd conquered western Poland without Britain and France's active intervention. But now the two countries had declared war, there was no longer any escaping the fact that Europe had been plunged into another massive conflict.

PERSPECTIVE

Polish Army chose exile

Defeat to Germany did not end the Polish Army. Many thousands of soldiers fled and later came to play an important role in the war.

Although Hitler's troops encircled much of the Polish Army, many soldiers and airmen managed to escape. Nearly 100,000 men crossed the border into Romania, which at the time was still neutral. The majority continued on to France, where 75,000 Polish soldiers took part in the fight against Nazi Germany in 1940. The Poles then fled to England. A further influx of Polish deserters, who were forced to fight in the German Army, swelled the exiled forces to 250,000 men during the war.

Polish pilots played a vital role during the Battle of Britain in 1940. Although the Poles constituted only five percent of the pilots in Britain's air defences, they accounted for 12 percent of victories during the Battle of Britain. Of the 1,736 aircraft the Germans lost, 203 were shot down by Polish pilots.

A part of the Polish naval fleet also escaped with a significant number reaching British shores. It brought together more troops who later participated in the sinking of the German battleship *Bismarck* in 1941.



Many Poles received medals for their efforts on the Western Front.



Battle-hardened Polish pilots formed their own squadrons in Britain.



BATTLE OF STALINGRAD

1942-1943

The battle of Stalingrad will be the most crucial battle on the Eastern Front. In the rubble of the city's ruins, Hitler's Sixth Army meets embittered resistance from an enemy who refuses to give up and fiercely defends every metre of land. German soldiers go from building to building, fighting through the City, attacking with determination until their route is stopped by the river Volga. The soldiers are stopped in their tracks with nowhere to go, ahead lies hunger, cold and senseless death.

1942-43



1942 23 August Luftwaffe starts bombing Stalingrad.

14 September Battle of Stalingrad begins in the western suburbs.

29 October The Germans sit on 90 per cent of the City.

19 November Russian counter offensive "Operation Uranus".

23 November The Red Army encircles Hitler's Sixth Army.

1943 2 February The last Germans surrender.

1942 1942 1942 1942 1942 1943

The night of 23 August, 1942, death rains down from the dark sky over Stalingrad. The roar from the German Luftwaffe cuts through the stillness of the night and shortly after, thousands of bombs hail down over the Soviet industrial city. Roads and railways disappear within seconds. Factories, hospitals and other concrete buildings collapse like a house of cards. On the river Volga which borders the city to the east, a large oil spill transforms it into an inferno of fire, sending clouds of thick black smoke skyward.

Soon the flames grab the city's apartment buildings, sending residents into a panic, escaping through the once magnificent industrial city that bears Stalin's name.

"The huge city stretching 56 km along the Volga, was consumed by fire. Everything was in flames and falling down. Death and disaster take their toll on thousands of families", notes the Soviet Lieutenant General Vasily Tjujkov on the nightly attacks that cost more than 30,000 lives.

Hitler goes on the attack

About a year earlier, the German dictator Adolf Hitler ordered Operation Barbarossa – the invasion of the Soviet Union. At the end of June 1941, about 4 million German soldiers crossed the Soviet border over a 3,200 km wide front, stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The goal was to crush Hitler's main ideological rival, Stalin, and conquer the Soviet Union's vast natural resources. The rich oil fields of the Caucasus and the large agricultural areas with their vast cornfields were of special interest to Hitler, who dreamt of transforming the Soviet Union into one large storehouse for the German people. To make his dream a reality, the Führer is prepared to sweep millions of Soviet citizens out of the way – in his eyes they are Slavic sub-humans.

50,000 Soviet citizens – voluntary and prisoners of war – fought in the Battle of Stalingrad.

Defeat at Moscow

The invasion of the Soviet Union is history's greatest military operation, but it came as a complete surprise to Stalin. Within two weeks, the Soviet dictator had organised his forces storming the Germans, 650 kilometres into the Soviet Union.

The Germans' winning streak does not look so good now. Stalin's troops soon begin to organise themselves and give the Germans unexpectedly stiff resistance. Later with stretched supply lines and the dreaded Russian Winter looming, there are big problems for Hitler's troops. In December 1941, the Germans suffer a humiliating defeat outside the walls of Moscow and are routed back to the west. The enraged Führer spews his frustration that his mighty warriors hae been defeated by a "Jewish Bolshevik gang".

Farther south, the advance is better, but still slower than Hitler would like. The terrain is rough, the weather changing and the Russians are fighting more fiercely than expected. From Stalingrad the German's organise an effective counter attack. In July 1942, frustrated by the slow invasion, Hitler orders his strongest army – the then 300,000-strong Sixth Army – to take the city. A conquest of Stalingrad will break the back of the Soviet defences and pave the way for a German major victory on the Eastern Front, says the Führer.



Prior to the attack, Luftwaffe bombers threw 1,000 tons of bombs on Stalingrad. At least 30,000 of the city's more than 400,000 people, lost their lives.

Stalin saved the city

Widespread bombing in August 1942 put Stalingrad in ruins, but the city's defences didn't falter. The authorities mobilise residents of all ages with the words: "Those, who do not assist the Red Army in every way and support its order and discipline, are traitors and must be killed without mercy."

Despite 30,000 deaths during the nightly bombing raids, Stalin refuses to evacuate the city that bears his name. In 1918 Stalingrad became the setting for one of the Bolshevik's most mythical victories during the Russian Civil War, where Stalin himself fought at times at the Front. According to official Soviet history, Stalin almost saved the city by himself and so it was named after him, as its saviour.

During the time of the Second World War, Stalingrad had turned into a Soviet model city with its countless factories playing a crucial role in the production of commodities like oil and weapons. The city has major economic and strategic importance – as well as great symbolic value. For Germans, a conquest of Stalin's own city would be a welcome propaganda victory for the humiliation of Moscow. For Russians, the city is the symbol of the Russian people's will to fight.

Germans are split

At the steppes, west of Stalingrad, Hitler struggles on. His troops are accustomed to the weather during the summer months and Soviet resistance on the road. And on September 14, the Sixth Army is ready to attack the city itself. From 6.30 pm the

KEY MOMENTS

ORDER NUMBER 227

July 28, 1942, Stalin's famous order no. 227 was issued whose main message was distributed in Stalingrad: "Not one step back!" Russian soldiers were ordered to fight to the death. Behind the front line troops were shot down if they ran from the scene. And any disobedient soldier was sent to 'punishment battalions' where they were forced to fight the toughest battles and even served as human mine-sweepers.


ДОРОГИЕ ТОВАРИЩИ!

РОДНЫЕ СТАЛИНГРАДЦЫ!

ТОВАРИЩИ СТАЛИНГРАДЦЫ!

ВЫХОДИТЕ ВСЕ НА СТРОИТЕЛЬСТВО БАРРИКАД.

БОЙЦЫ КРАСНОЙ АРМИИ! ЗАЩИТНИКИ СТАЛИНГРАДА!

НИ ШАГУ НАЗАД!

In mid-September, the Germans move into Stalingrad's suburbs – beginning a five-month long, nightmare.

TECHNIQUE..... CULTURE..... ECONOMY..... DAILY LIFE.....



Civilians seek refuge in burrows

Before the German attack, Stalingrad was home to about 400,000 people. Few managed to escape before Stalin forbade it. Luftwaffe bombing made the city uninhabitable for the remaining, who moved into makeshift burrows in the ravines near the town. Here, they witnessed an endless nightmare of explosions, hunger, disease and death. Many, even town's women, were also called up either for the army or for example, to dig trenches.

>>>> German planes and tanks rattle toward the city. Before them, Stalingrad lies full of concrete ruins, trenches and bomb craters.

Hitler has staked everything on his Blitzkrieg tactic – based on close cooperation between fighters, quickly advancing armored tanks and infantry – enabling the Germans to conquer the city in a short time.

However, the tanks are stuck in the devastated streets and the Luftwaffe dare not bomb for fear of hitting their own troops. The many burned buildings block the way for the advancing Germans and split them up into hundreds of small groups. Flocks of German soldiers run uncertainly through Stalingrad's grey and sooty streets where they must fight their way building to building – a style of fighting which is unfamiliar to them.

"Shooting from all sides"

While the Germans are trying to get used to the unfamiliar urban warfare, the Red Army create small, mobile groups armed with machine guns, hand grenades, bottles with flammable liquid and anti-tank rifles. Each group consists of 50-100 men. In Stalingrad's empty buildings they establish small garrisons that constantly bombard the Germans.

"You cannot even see them. They have found a foothold in homes and basements and shoot at us from all sides. Barbarians! They are using gangster tactics", notes the German soldier Wilhelm Hoffman.

The small Russian groups act largely on their own and move much faster around Stalingrad's streets than the big German units that find it difficult to adapt from the great battles on the plains.

"Rat War", bitter fighting

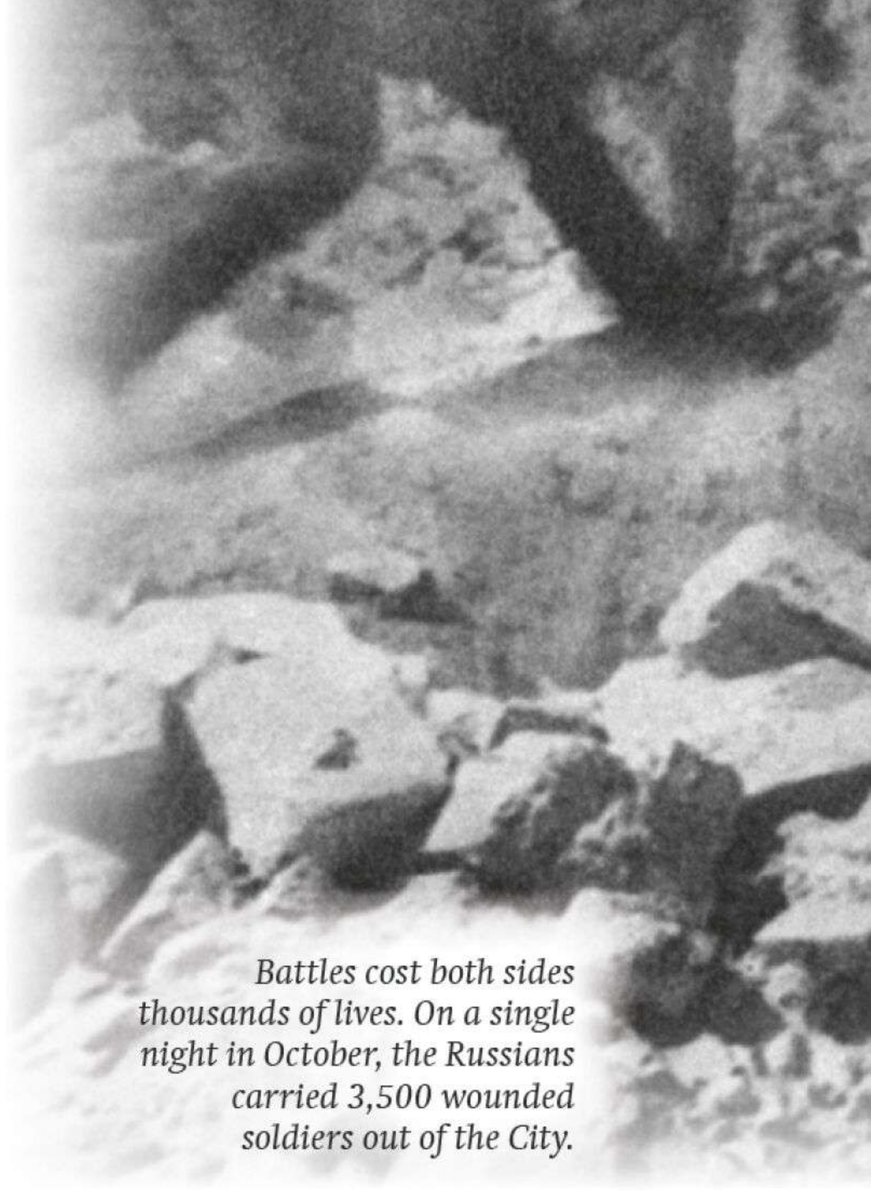
Despite fierce Soviet resistance, the Germans move slowly through Stalingrad – metre by metre – and force the Russians to take refuge in ruins and sewers. Desperate Soviet soldiers throw themselves into bloody man-to-man combat with bayonets and grenades, or try to lure German tanks in ambush. Everywhere, streets frame the brutal fighting that is constantly pushing the front line back and forth. The strategically important railway station in the middle of Stalingrad changes hands a full 15 times in just five days. "The Russians are shooting from all sides. We must stay in our basement, we cannot move around the streets. Our experienced soldiers have never experienced such bitter fighting before", wrote Wilhelm Hoffman about the street fighting, the Germans baptize "rat war".

Hitler's victory accustomed troops are shocked by the enemy's fighting zeal and irritated by the slow advance. Often, entire regiments spend up to a day just clearing a single building because the teams move from floor to floor and from room to room.

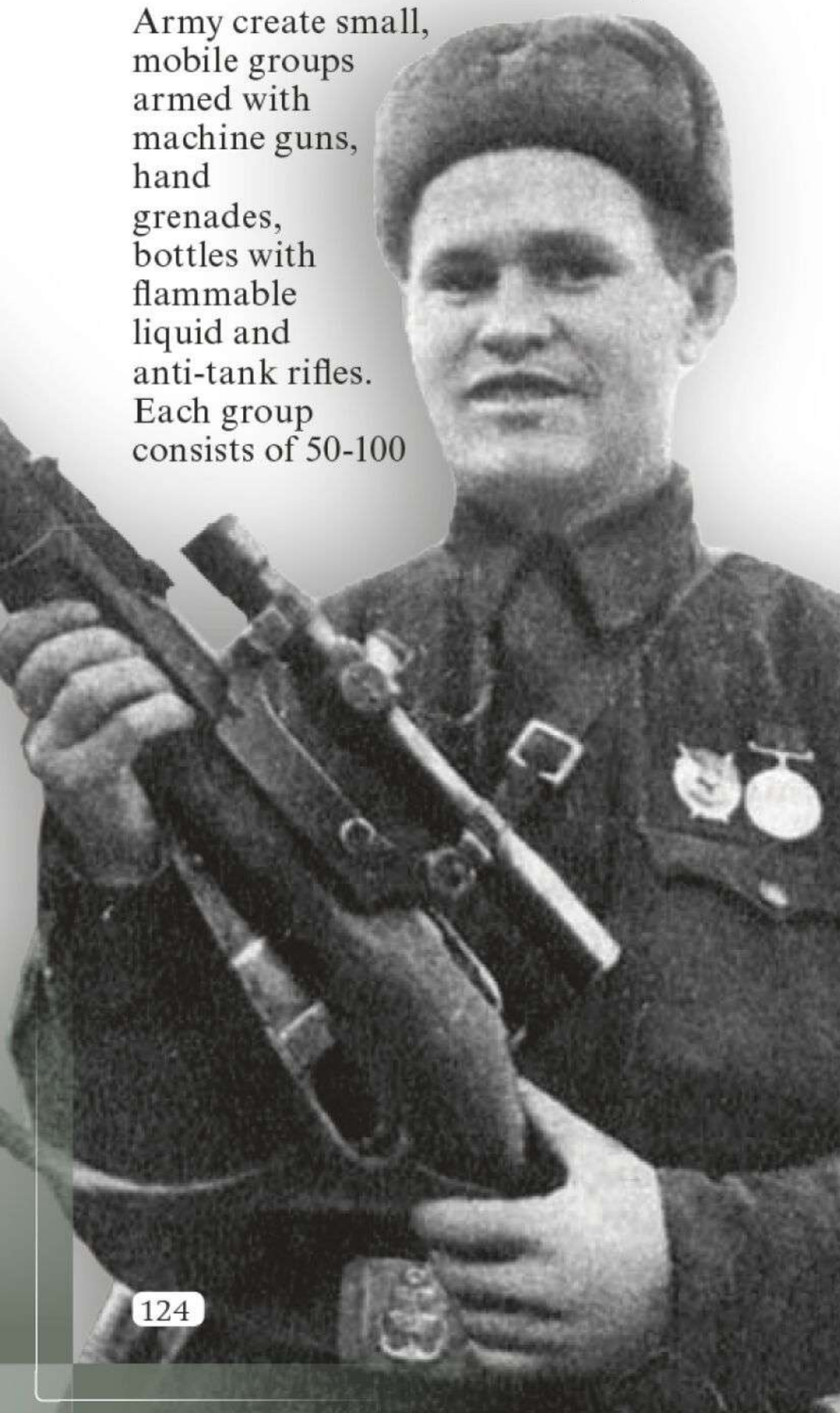
"Our battalion has attacked four times, each time they've been stopped. Russian snipers hit all who show caution – even behind the barricades", wrote Hoffman.

Night belongs to the Russians

The Soviet resistance is kept on their feet by the power of arms, munitions and fresh



Battles cost both sides thousands of lives. On a single night in October, the Russians carried 3,500 wounded soldiers out of the City.



VASILIJ ZAJTSEV *1915-1991*

MARKSMAN FROM STALINGRAD

■ One of the Red Army's main weapons in the battle for Stalingrad was sniper fire and among the most prominent snipers was the 62nd Army's Vasily Zaytsev. With his Mosin rifle, the former shepherd boy from the mountains, took the lives of 149 Germans single-handedly during October, 1942. Zajtsev was subsequently made the hub of the Soviet propaganda machine. Russians read about how Zajtsev fought a several-day-long duel with a mysterious German Major named König, allegedly the chief of the sniper school in Berlin and sent to Stalingrad to get to Zajtsev. Russian action eventually prevailed. König's telescopic sight is exhibited in a museum in Moscow.

Shot 149 German's in one month – Head of Tjujkov's sniper school – Awarded medal



soldiers sailing daily across the Volga to a number of bridgeheads on the river's west bank. During the day time, Luftwaffe shows no mercy and mercilessly bombs the Russian vessels, but when darkness descends over Stalingrad the river belongs to the Russians. Steamships, sloops, dredgers, fishing boats and rowing boats shuttle back and forth across the river with supplies and reserve troops.

Supply lines transform Hitler's blitz into a war of attrition, and the Germans are losing soldiers in droves. An especially severe loss of officers threatens to cripple Hitler's troops.

"The Russian fire cost us heavy losses. Both men and officers are disillusioned and quiet. We have lost many men: every time you move you have to jump over dead bodies. The soldiers called Stalingrad our own mass grave", notes Hoffman gloomy.

Bomber attacks 3,000 times

The Sixth Army commander, General Friedrich Paulus, designates 14 October as "the day when we must try to break the deadlock and put an end to the German soldiers' hardships". In a gigantic offensive, 90,000 Germans charge into Stalingrad's northern industrial area in a decisive attempt to reach the Volga's west bank. Massive bombs rain from Luftwaffe, transforming the 4.5 km wide Front into a burning inferno where explosions follow explosions and buildings crumble into dust, while infantry and armored tanks grind forward. According to the Soviet Lieutenant General Tjujkov, German bombers implement the entire 3,000 attacks with "unprecedented ferocity".

As time progresses, the Soviet positions slowly disintegrate under the pressure of the Luftwaffe and the Sixth Army. Metre by metre, the Germans push the final three kilometres up to the Volga. It's midnight when they arrive at the river.

Paulus's plan is to drive south along the Volga and meet up with the forces that have consumed the city centre and the southern areas. En route, he will interrupt the supply lines of the Volga and encircle the Russians. But Tjujkov has a trap ready.

"Paulus's tactics were clear: he tried to lure our main forces to the factory area and paralyse them there, while he secretly planned the attack on other sectors", explains Tjujkov, who orders his men to halt the German advance along the Volga – at any cost.

As the sun rises over Stalingrad on the third day of the offensive, Paulus's troops have conquered so much of Stalingrad that they can almost break the flow of Russian soldiers over the Volga. Tjujkov's exhausted men can barely fight on. Front lines no longer exist and the chaotic battles have sucked all of the soldiers' courage and fighting spirit. Stalingrad's defence falters as never before.

In a crucial rescue mission, in the midst of Soviet forces darkest hour, a Soviet ship in the shelter of the following night, manages to smuggle an entire division of soldiers across the Volga. The fresh men give Tjujkov's forces renewed vigour to continue the dogged resistance against advancing German troops.

Soldiers fight with shovels

In Stalingrad's large factory buildings, the fighting is outrageously violent. The

> “Stalingrad has made us into creatures with no feelings”

soldiers chase each other with flame throwers, knives, shovels and clubs – often separated by only a wall or a floor.

“The Front is transformed into a corridor between burnt-out a room: the Front is the thin ceiling between two floors. The incessant battles go on from noon to midnight. From floor to floor we bombard each other with grenades – surrounded by clouds of dust and smoke, heaps of shells, rivers of blood, fragments of furniture and people”, wrote the German lieutenant Wiener about the brutal fighting, which is also covered by the journalist Vasily Grossman from the Soviet army newspaper Red Star:

“Not one man in the division gave an inch in this battle. And if the Germans succeeded in conquering a certain point, it meant that not a single man from the Red Army had survived and could defend it. It was as if the dead ceded their strength to the survivors.”

Despite the fine words, the Russians are threatened with complete annihilation. Paulus’s men are close to having surrounded the last remnants of the Red Army, west of the Volga, and Tjujkov must make an unprecedented and daring decision: tactical withdrawal – against Stalin’s orders – to a small area central to the city which is easier to defend with the Sixth Army on their heels, pulling the Russians back and entrenching themselves near the Volga. The retreat buys the Russians precious time to regroup.

GERMANS, EXHAUSTED AND BITTER

When the front begins to stabilise in late October, the Germans have conquered 90 per cent of Stalingrad. But the campaign has cost dearly. Winter sets in and the cold shakes the Sixth Army soldiers, while the snow is whipping them in the face. The Russian winter is pushing temperatures down below -40 ° C and the Germans, unlike the Russians, are not dressed for winter war. Frost bite and amputations will soon become a part of everyday life. Nearly 15,000 soldiers have lost limbs because of the cold.

While the frost bites, Soviet war planes relentlessly attack German barracks and tents and the Red Army artillery sends constant bursts of shells against the Germans, from the Volga’s opposite bank. The explosions rob the Germans of the sleep their bodies scream for.

“We have not been resting. Everyone is depressed. Stalingrad has transformed us into creatures without feelings – we are exhausted and disillusioned. We barely dare lift our heads because of the noise from the Russian artillery”, wrote the soldier, Hoffman.

THE TRAP BITES

While hiding from artillery fire in Stalingrad’s ruins, the exhausted soldiers are completely unaware that the real threat is much farther away than the guns on the other side of the Volga. While the Germans have fought from building to building throughout Stalingrad, the Red Army has secretly accumulated more than one million troops, 13,500 guns and 900 tanks on the steppes, north and south of Stalingrad, ready for Operation Uranus.

Early in the morning on November 19 there were reports of an 80 minute long bombardment in the sky over the frozen landscape outside Stalingrad, so powerful that the earth shook. Soviet tanks and foot soldiers installed themselves on the steppes northwest of Stalingrad. Exactly two minutes after the last blow, the Red Army storm forward. By noon, Stalin’s troops break through the Germans’ flanks which are now manned by Romanian and Italian auxiliary soldiers.

Paulus must abandon fighting in Stalingrad’s ruins and send his tanks to the new Front that the Russians have opened up to the west. Shortly after, reports arrive saying that the Russians are now attacking from the southeast, too.

A gigantic pincer movement is underway and the Russians’ rapid advance spreads panic through the German lines. They quickly try to organise a solution. Exhausted soldiers, inadequate supplies and vulnerable lines of communication make Hitler’s troops at an easy opponent.

BATTLE OF STALINGRAD

RED ARMY SURROUNDS GERMANS

Stalingrad should have been Hitler’s big, symbolic triumph over Stalin after the humiliating defeat on the Front at Moscow. Instead, the city was a huge slaughter house, where the fortunes of war definitely turned. The town was unexpectedly harsh and only too late, it became clear that Stalingrad had effectively acted as bait in a giant Soviet trap for Hitler’s strong Sixth Army.

23 AUGUST – 29 OCTOBER 1942



■ *After a violent bombardment, air supported German troops move slowly through Stalingrad. After more than two months of brutal urban combat, Hitler’s Sixth Army stand over 90 per cent of the City – the Red Army retained two small pockets of defence.*

19 NOVEMBER 1942 – 12 JANUARY 1943



■ *With a gigantic pincer movement, the Red Army encircle the Sixth Army from the North and Southeast. Rather than allowing the 275,000 men to break out, Hitler orders that the troops should stand firm in Stalingrad – and supplies will be flown in.*

To make the troops more mobile, the Red Army divided its forces into small, individual operating units.

Within a few days Stalin's men overwhelm the confused and tired Germans.

On November 23, the Soviet trap closes on Hitler's Sixth Army.

While the Soviet soldiers are ecstatic and burst into gigantic celebrations, the remaining 275,000 German soldiers are in trouble, pressed up against Stalingrad, from all sides.

AIRLIFT RESCUES SURROUNDED MEN

Distraught General Paulus sends a plea for help from Berlin:

"The army is surrounded ... We have little fuel left; when it is used, the tanks and heavy weapons will be immobile. Ammunition is scarce, our supplies will only last six days ... Requesting the freedom to act ... This situation may force us to leave Stalingrad".

Hitler is now facing perhaps his most important decision since the outbreak of war in 1939. If he pulls the Sixth Army out of Stalingrad, the army will survive and be able to stabilise the German position in the Caucasus. But should he decide to retreat, that will undoubtedly mean that Stalingrad is lost to the Russians.

At worst, Hitler thinks that the German troops' fight will collapse and put the whole invasion of the Soviet Union in danger. He overhears Luftwaffe chief, Jeschonnek's warnings and decides that the Sixth Army must hold Stalingrad assisted by an airlift of 700 tons supplies, daily. But Luftwaffe finds it impossible to deliver them in the harsh weather and with its limited number of aircraft.

Undeterred, Hitler's Sixth Army is informed that it "must hold its position at any cost, despite the threat of temporary encirclement by the Russians".

Paulus and the other the officers are shaken. If the army doesn't break out soon, it will be doomed. The officers suggest going against Hitler's orders to

13 JANUARY – 2 FEBRUARY 1943



Luftwaffe fails to deliver sufficient supplies, and hungry and freezing, the Germans huddle together for survival. The last remnants of the Sixth Army are huddled in two isolated pockets when they finally give up.



Hitler ordered the Luftwaffe to fly 700 tons daily supplies to the encircled Sixth Army. Constant blizzards and lack of space made the task impossible and Russian air defences shot down an average five German aircraft every day.

save soldiers' lives, but always loyal, Paulus refuses. On 24 November, Hitler cuts through all the protests with his final order: "Volga Front and Northern Front must be maintained at all costs! Supplies will come by air".

Luftwaffe's missing plane

As Paulus and Jeschonnek have foreseen, the airlifts struggle to get supplies to the Sixth Army.

Pilots must repeatedly engage in reckless manoeuvres with the heavy, lumbering transport planes, when cold, dark, fog and snowstorms force them to take off and land in the dark. On land, fighters work hard under appalling conditions to make the runways usable. Several of the airfields don't have snow plows and the exhausted men have to clear the 30 centimetres of new snow daily. Also they don't have hangars, oil and other basic necessities. "The cold has made it incredibly difficult to start the engines and maintain them. Without any protection from the cold or snowstorms, our staff toil incessantly, until their hands freeze", wrote the German General Wolfgang Pickert about the hardships.

In the air, transport planes are an easy target for enemy fighters. The Russians quickly learn the German's fixed routes and need only lie in wait to shoot down the Germans' heavy giants. Luftwaffe lost about five flights daily and deliveries are becoming increasingly uncertain and unstable. In late November, the Luftwaffe can only deliver 10 per cent of the planned daily delivery – to an army which has been starving for several weeks. In late December the Germans lose their two main airports to the Red Army's advancing troops and even the most stubborn can gradually see that the rickety airlift can in no way save Hitler's Sixth Army.

Soldiers are starving to death

Inside Stalingrad there's famine and desperation. The violent snow and cold makes life an unbearable suffering and the small, pitiful bread rations are all that's keeping the men alive. Most soldiers are physically so malnourished that they look like bony old men.

"Until July, every man received a ration of 100 grams of bread. After Christmas, the ration was reduced to 50 grams. Later, only men on the Front received 50 grams. The rest got water soup, which we tried to improve with the bones of dead horses, we dug up", wrote a German colonel.

On 7 January, Paulus received a radio message with a definitive ultimatum from the Russians:

"You, as the commander, and all the officers of the surrounded forces, should realise that you do not have a realistic chance to break free. Your position is hopeless and further resistance is futile", is the message from the Soviet generals.

They promise that the Germans will get medical care and food rations if they surrender. But the Germans do not accept

Up to 100,000 of the approximately 275,000 encircled soldiers lost their lives during the Soviet counter offensive. Many died of cold, and the living had to pull the clothes from the dead in order to survive.



After the battle Soviet soldiers were honoured with a medal "For the defence of Stalingrad".

the extended hand, they would rather the Sixth Army be wiped out. Paulus rejects the offer.

Sixth Army falls apart

At 8.05 the next morning, the Russians send flares up into the winter sky over Stalingrad's ruins. Seconds later, 7,000 guns open fire on the snow frozen landscape. The German soldiers huddle in the trenches while the explosions from the Soviet artillery hammer down. For 55 long minutes, the Germans are showered with soil and metal splinters. Soviet foot soldiers and tanks speed across the plains toward the German positions. The Germans are appalled yet continue to fight for their lives in the tearing snowstorm. With full strength, the Red Army thunders on crushing everything in its path. With all hope finally gone, the German soldiers begin to leave their posts, while Soviet tanks with banner wielding soldiers on top approach Stalingrad to the tune of communist battle songs.

Frozen lumps of corpses are strewn throughout the winter-hardened ground where small groups of panicked Germans run in random directions. Starved and wounded soldiers crawl and drag themselves through the snow.

> "Famished soldiers drag themselves through the snow"

The fallen are immediately assaulted by former comrades who rip clothes and boots from the dead to increase their own chance of survival against the brutal blizzard. Everywhere, the landscape is littered with burnt-out tanks and remnants of the dying Sixth Army.

While the world collapses around him, Paulus sits in a dark cellar under the ruins of a department store where he receives the order from Hitler to fight to the last drop of blood:

"Surrender is not an option! The troops must defend themselves to the last!"

The last Germans retreat into Stalingrad's interior as fighting has turned into a ruined landscape. Here, they come together in dark basements and wait, sick, dying and traumatised, for their fate. "Stalingrad is no longer a city. By day it is a huge cloud of burning, blinding smoke. And when night comes – these haunting, howling, cursed nights – dogs leap in the Volga and swim desperately to reach the other side. Nights in Stalingrad are a nightmare for them. Even animals want to escape from this hell", wrote the German Lieutenant Wiener.

Before long, the advancing Russians divide Germans into two isolated pockets. In the streets are meagre, shabby soldiers, wracked from exhaustion. Reluctantly, Paulus must stop rations for the 25,000 wounded, so that the soldiers still able to fight can be kept alive.

German officers openly discuss whether to surrender or to commit suicide. Some still speak fanatically about fighting to the bitter end and to be an inspiration for the future of German youth.

Paulus sends a telegram to Berlin and Hitler, begging to be allowed to surrender:

"The troops are without food and ammunition ... It is inevitable that we collapse. The army are asking for permission to surrender and save the remaining lives".

The Führer responds by appointing Paulus to Field Marshal. No German Field Marshal has ever surrendered in battle, so the message is clear: fight to the death.

Paulus surrenders

The Russians cut directly through to Stalingrad's heart where thousands of Germans stand with their hands over their heads in surrender. Others do not even have the strength to surrender, but collapse on the streets wounded, starving and exhausted. The Russian soldier, Mansur Abdulin, who went to liberate Stalingrad, describes the absurd scene:

"White cloths were hanging from window sills and high on top of the rubble is a pile of white rags. It is still. There's not a sound. 'Surrender'. I do not remember who said the word, but it is said softly as if the word said quietly, might have less impact, it might scare the fear away".

While Stalin's forces squeezes the last breath from the German soldiers, Paulus finally realises that the battle is lost.

On 31 January the exhausted, ill and disillusioned Field Marshal surrenders to a mere 21-year-old Russian lieutenant. Two days later the last encircled and surrounded German units in Stalingrad's northern industrial area, also surrender. After nearly five months of uninterrupted strikes and fighting, silence finally falls on Stalingrad. ■

BATTLE OF MOSCOW

BLITZKRIEG FREEZES FAST

Hitler's troops begin their attack on Moscow. Everything points to a magnificent victory as the advanced forces get the Kremlin's spires in their sights. But the icy winter has set in, and as the temperature plummets, Stalin deploys his reserves in battle, turning the war on the Eastern Front.



1941

2ND OCTOBER

The harsh Russian winter proved a tough ordeal for both Germans and their equipment alike.

Eastern Front, 1941

THE STAGE IS SET



Since June, Germany's Panzer divisions have rolled inexorably forward over the Russian steppes. Vast swathes of territory are captured and millions of Soviet soldiers taken prisoner. Intoxicated by his success, Hitler envisages the final victory is near. Now for the ultimate humiliation for the Soviet Union: the capture of Moscow.

THE NIGHT OF 2ND OCTOBER, 1941 was warm and quiet on the ridge above the Desna River. Artillery Lieutenant Georg Richter was in place with a view of no-man's land down to the river bed and the Red Army positions on the other side. The day before, he had counted eight bunkers.

"I believe the attack will start the next day", he wrote in his diary that evening. "In my opinion it will be the last big operation this year".

Richter was right. At 04.40 the next morning, at least 20 guns batteries shattered the silence, raining shells down over the Soviet positions. This was swiftly followed by a swarm of Stuka dive bombers. With the characteristic whining of their engines, the planes descended in a steep vertical dive before dropping their bombs on their targets at the last possible minute. Meanwhile, rocket launchers left trails of white smoke behind their deadly payloads. Before long, a new sound was added to the noisy inferno: the engine roar of hundreds of German tanks and infantry in trucks heading towards the Soviet positions.

"It ought to be all over before winter", Richter wrote that evening. The officer was in no doubt he was about to witness the final death throes of the Soviet Union.

> **"It ought to be all over before winter"**
>
> Artillery Lieutenant Georg Richter in his diary

The final target was Moscow

Hitler's great campaign against communism had been in progress for three months, and the list of victories made impressive reading. Army Group Centre's armoured troops, with customary lightning speed, had taken the large cities of Bialystok, Minsk and Smolensk on route to the Soviet capital. Leningrad on the Baltic Sea was cut off by Army Group North, and at Kiev Army Group South had captured over 600,000 Soviet soldiers in history's largest Blitzkrieg. One more shock would be enough to collapse the Red Army, German High Command decreed, and Moscow was designated as the target for that final attack.

Stalin's state apparatus had long been preparing the capital for an attack. 100 kilometres left of Moscow 200,000 commandeered citizens – many of them women – had been digging trenches, constructing anti-tank barriers and hundreds of bunkers since mid-July. From north to south, the fortified belt stretched 170 kilometres and was to provide a fulcrum for armies at the front to fall back to if the Germans attacked. But work on the defensive posts was far from complete when the German offensive against Moscow, code-named Operation Typhoon began. Only half of the Red Army forces at the front ahead of Moscow made it back to the defensive line – Stalin's troops were taken by surprise when General Guderian – nicknamed "Schneller Heinz" (Fast Heinz) by his admiring troops – began his advance on 30th September.

The rest of Army Group Centre attacked two days later.

The offensive repeated the campaign's first days back in June, when Panzer divisions sliced through Stalin's border defences and rolled into the Soviet hinterland, putting German soldiers in euphoric mood.

This time Army Group Centre reached the first of its targets in just six days. At the industrial city of Bryansk, three Soviet armies were cut off from retreat and to the north, four more were encircled in Vyazma.

Stalin's front collapsed

All order and coordination soon collapsed on the Russian side, and many thought only of escape. Among them were a group of soldiers including Boris Oreshkin, who wandered blindly through the woods of Vyazma all night on 10th October.

They were seeking a way out of the trap, but kept encountering German troops. After a long night dodging constant shelling he surrendered. "I was never more exhausted in my life", he said later. "We were conveyed to a village by a single soldier. He was walking ahead of us and didn't even think it was necessary to hold the gun in his hands. He was sure that we would do nothing to him and showed me the whole hopelessness of our situation".

Oreshkin was one of the lucky ones, surviving both the battle and German



Storming of Moscow begins

The operation begins with one of Germany's greatest victories: seven Soviet armies are defeated. But a lack of fuel and bad weather halts the offensive.

0 200 400 600 800 1,000 km

1 3rd Panzer Army splits

The 3rd Panzer Army's strength is divided along two axes: one moves quickly towards Moscow on a northerly route; the other heads to attack Vyazma.

2 4th Panzers go three ways

The 4th Panzer Army breaks through Soviet lines. Some units continue to Moscow, while the others turn off to meet the German forces on the road to Vyazma north. The Soviet forces are slow to react to the German attack, and four of its armies are surrounded by Vyazma.

3 Russians get caught out

From the south, part of the 2nd Panzer Army heads for Bryansk, while the rest carry on northeast towards Tula.

4 Soviets lose seven armies

The Soviets also fail to escape Bryansk. Three armies are surrounded and wiped out. In all, the Russians have now lost seven armies.

5 Offensive halted

The Red Army's 26th Army provides fierce resistance at Tula. Fuel shortages force the German advance to a halt.

6 Bad weather slows Germans

Various Soviet forces fail to hold on to Borodino and Borovsk. But the weather comes to the Red Army's aid. Rain turns the roads into mud and slows the German troops to further delay their advance.

Kalinin
Moscow
Borodino
Gzhatsk
Borovsk
Vyazma
Tula
Smolensk
Kirov
Roslavl
Bryansk
3rd Panzer Army
German-Russian front 30th September
4th Panzer Army
2nd Panzer Army

Infantry moved faster than the tanks when rain transformed the Russian roads into a muddy quagmire.

WEHRMACHT Army Group Centre	
SOLDIERS:	1,929,000
TANKS:	1,000
AIRCRAFT:	1,390
ARTILLERY:	14,000

THE RED ARMY Soviet Western, Reserve and Bryansk Fronts	
SOLDIERS:	1,250,000
TANKS:	990
AIRCRAFT:	863
ARTILLERY:	34,700

MOSCOW CAMPAIGN

GERMANS' SLOW MARCH COST THEM VICTORY

30th September The German Army Group Centre has three armoured and three infantry armies ready along a 500-kilometre line. The Red Army has 15 armies, but only half the strength because it's not yet mobilised enough soldiers.

2nd October Germany begins its offensive against Moscow. According to Hitler's plan, it will decide the entire campaign.

7th October The first melting snow falls around Bryansk. The roads turn to mud, and the German tanks get bogged down.

13th October Frost makes the roads passable once more, and German armies resume their offensive against Moscow.

27th October German Panzer Armies attack the Red Army defensive line, leading to a Soviet retreat. But bad weather, fuel shortages and damaged bridges once again delay the German attack on Moscow.

12th November The temperature around Moscow drops to 12 degrees below zero, and the Red Army sends forces on skis against German soldiers in front of the city.

15th November German assault on Moscow.

27th November Germans advance northwest of Moscow and cross the Moscow-Volga Canal. Just two days later, they are pushed back across the canal.

5th December The front stops. Soviet General Zhukov has managed to assemble a superior army. A Soviet counterattack drives the Germans back.

16th December Hitler orders his army to dig in and wait for reinforcements from the west. The order is ignored at the front, and German soldiers flee westward.

captivity. Elsewhere, entire Soviet units were led to a bloody end rushing against enemy positions.

German Private HE Braun's unit was one of those defending against wave after wave of attack from Soviet soldiers. When dawn broke he thought the suicidal rush was over, but some of the "fallen" had only played dead. Suddenly they stood up and "a sea of Red Army soldiers" charged their positions. Many were hit by German bullets, but others continued on, rampaging through the German positions.

Several Germans were trampled to death, and horses ran in panic in all directions, while trucks crammed with Soviet soldiers raced close past Braun's position. The Germans fought for their lives with pistols, hand grenades and even spades until a group of tanks finally came to their rescue.

Around 85,000 Soviet soldiers escaped the Vyazma encirclement, while 23,000 managed to escape Bryansk. Red Army casualties were unimaginable. The official figure claimed a total of 658,279 dead, missing or captured, but in fact the two battles cost up to one million men. Large quantities of supplies were destroyed or fell into German hands.

15-year-old Maria Denisova's village was at the centre of some of the bloodiest battles. As the fighting ceased, she crawled up from the basement of her parents' house to witness a horrific scene. "There were so many dead bodies all over the place", she recalled. "Some didn't have legs, heads or other parts. We had



When the offensive stalled, the German forces were close to their campaign goal, but a long way from home.

to walk on them since there was no other place to step".

Denisova lost both her parents in the battle. She and the village's other survivors were forced to drink water from the river, even though it ran red with blood.

Stalin went underground

After the disaster at Vyazma and Bryansk, the Soviet leader feared it wouldn't be possible to stop the Germans from advancing to Moscow. On 15th October, he ordered 1,000 factories in the capital destroyed while simultaneously moving his government from the Kremlin to Kuibyshev over 800 kilometres to the east. Even then, Stalin hesitated, unsure whether to flee to stay.

The Kremlin had no shelters, so Stalin moved to the makeshift Air Defence headquarters. From here, a lift connected to the underlying underground station. Secure from the threat of the Luftwaffe, he took refuge in a special compartment in a train hidden from the rest of the station by plywood panelling. Here he could both work and sleep. Moscow's darkest hour had arrived.

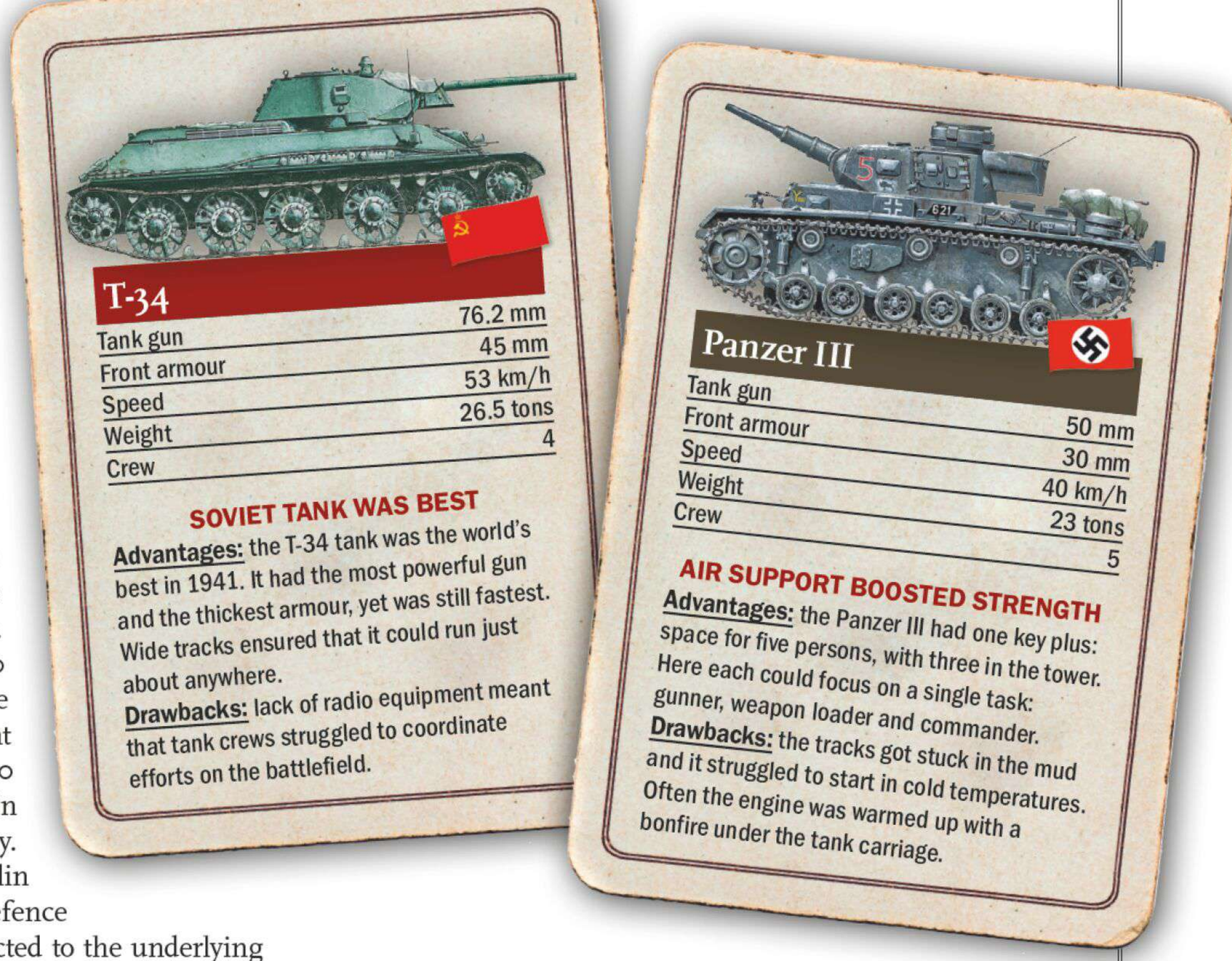
As officials and party members boarded trains to the east the next day, Muscovites quickly realised their leaders were leaving them. Many assumed Stalin had already left, and what had been a fairly orderly evacuation descended into panic. Shops throughout the city were looted, and citizens burned their Stalin portraits and party membership cards en masse. Some did it out of fear for being shot by Germans when they took the city, while others were happy to see the prospect of getting rid of Stalin's oppressive regime. In the streets around central institutions, semi-burned papers floated through the air, evidence that officials were in the process of burning their archived documents.

The offensive ground to a halt

While panic spread in Moscow, the German forces en route to the city were themselves running into difficulties. The Russian dirt roads were transformed to a river of impassable mud by rain, sleet and snow. The troops were paying the price for Hitler's spring campaign in the Balkans, which had postponed the attack on the Soviet Union for over a month.

"We can't go on. There is no more petrol and nothing is coming up behind us", one exhausted German soldier wrote. "The snow has melted and worsened the muck. Rations still do not arrive and we sit in filth the entire day".

In the battle against the mud, German tanks used three times more fuel than planned. The infantry, who for months had lagged far behind the tanks and other motorised vehicles now overtook them. The Germans took – with much effort – a Stalin's defensive line 100 kilometres from Moscow, but then the advance ground to a halt. The mud and a shortage of supplies along the entire front made it impossible to continue.



At the end of October Hitler ordered a pause until 15th November, so the forces could be reorganised and the frost given time to harden the ground.

Meanwhile, Stalin regained his courage in Moscow. In the afternoon of 19th October he decided to stay in the city.

Units both large and small that hadn't been caught in the snares at Vyazma and Bryansk arrived in Moscow's hinterland, where they joined up with the reserve forces that had flowed in from the east and from less pressed parts of the front. 440,000 civilian workers were also called up and armed to participate in defending the Soviet capital.

On the 24th anniversary of the Communist takeover on 7th November, 1917, Stalin ordered a parade to bolster the fighting spirit of the new recruits and Moscow's remaining citizens. Despite the threat from the Luftwaffe, he wished to carry out the annual military parade at Red Square in front of the Kremlin. From there the soldiers would march directly to the front.

The cameras were soon in place under the steel grey morning sky, so Stalin could show the nation that he hadn't bolted. From 08.00, column after column trod over the cobblestones, newly fallen snow on their caps and uniforms, followed by the flag-bearing cavalry and finally the stars of the show: the Red Army's mighty T-34 tanks.

Recruit Leonid Shevelev had heard the rumours that Stalin had fled. Now the sight of the dictator on top of Lenin's mausoleum gave the draftees new heart: "This made us march with the kind of determination as if we were nailing down the coffins of the advancing Nazis". Stalin assured the soldiers that Hitler's Germany would "collapse under the weight of its own crimes".

> **"So many dead bodies"**
>
> 15-year-old Maria Denisova

The German tanks rolled on once more

Eight days after the Red Army parade, Army Group Centre opened the second phase of Operation Typhoon. An attack northwest of Moscow was designed to lead to the encirclement of the city before winter's snowfall made



Unlike the Germans, many Soviet soldiers were equipped with warm clothes and snow-white camouflage suits. The Soviets also had better access to supplies and reinforcements than the invaders.



Thick felted wool socks kept the Red Army soldiers' feet warm and dry in their boots.

it impossible to manoeuvre.

But it was an exhausted, starved, freezing and lice-infested army that advanced to battle.

Hitler and his generals had not expected that the war against the Soviet Union would last so long, and had optimistically failed to provide proper winter equipment. The vast majority of German soldiers were forced to fight in sub-zero temperatures wearing summer uniforms, and already the Russian winter was creating serious problems for both men and equipment.

Soldiers wore women's clothes

One particular irritation for soldiers was crawling lice. Poor levels of hygiene also spread dysentery, which in the winter cold could prove fatal. When the men constantly had to expose themselves because of diarrhoea, "they lost more body warmth than they could afford to lose", according to medical officer Heinrich Happe.

His crude solution was to cut a hole in the bottom of soldiers' trousers, so they could easily relieve themselves.

A lack of warm winter coats and woollen underwear led German troops to steal any clothes they could get from the local civilian population. In some cases, soldiers in battle were wrapped in several layers of Russian women's clothes. The cold also prevented the Luftwaffe from supporting forces advancing on land. With temperatures 20 degrees below zero, Stuka dive bombers struggled to get their planes started. Soviet equipment was much hardier.

"Russian aircraft totally dominate air space", the otherwise confident Richter wrote in his diary on 26th November. Machine guns failed work due to the frost, while in several units frostbite and cold gradually took more victims than the enemy's bullets and grenades. Only the German soldiers' firm belief that they were in the process of fighting the campaign's last battle kept them going.



"Fight for Moscow" commanded posters from the Soviet propaganda machine.

Northwest of Moscow, the Red Army was pushed back step by step. But although the Wehrmacht held on to the initiative, the advance slowed to a snail's pace. Soviet troops fought where they stood, and when the force was too much, they had time to retreat to new positions. Gone was the panic of Vyazma and Bryansk.

On the evening of 4th December, Army Group Centre's forces were exhausted. Less than 20 kilometres from Moscow's outskirts, the forward units could clearly see Moscow's towers and spires in the frosty area. But Operation Typhoon had finally stalled – literally bogged down in the snow and out of fuel.

Meanwhile, the Red Army was busily preparing its response. General Georgy Zhukov was the new commander of the army's

Moscow Front and had spent weeks building up large reserves. Despite its huge losses, the Red Army's troops at the front were now stronger than they'd been at the beginning of Operation Typhoon. Zhukov had over 30 percent more soldiers, twice as much artillery and 2.5 times as many tanks as at the beginning of the battle. In contrast, Army Group Centre had not replaced the personnel and equipment that had been lost.

Germans were driven away from Moscow

One of the spearheads of Zhukov's counterattack was Lieutenant Pavel Gudz's armoured unit. On the evening of 5th December, he stood in the snow on a river bank 30 kilometres northwest of the Kremlin. Behind him a heavy tank was rolling into position, but its engine noise was drowned out by the scattered fire from guns on both sides of the front.

Gudz peered through his binoculars for the best place to launch the next morning's attack. The target was an unsuspecting German armoured division, which had stopped for the night in the nearby village of Nefedyevo. Between remote blasts of gunfire Gudz could hear the tones of an accordion, which floated out from one of the houses.

Gudz's unit attacked at dawn. Before the Germans could react, eight of their 18 tanks were ablaze. The remaining troops ran for cover behind the houses, but it wasn't long before they were in full flight towards the west – closely followed by Gudz's tank and volleys of Soviet artillery fire. Gudz won a medal for the action – and he was far from an isolated example.

Everywhere along the front, Zhukov's counterattack caught the Germans unawares. During the first 10 days of the counteroffensive, a series of towns and villages northwest of Moscow came back under Soviet control. And to the south, Guderian's armoured divisions barely escaped being surrounded. The sight of exhausted German soldiers in their hopelessly inadequate uniforms gave the Red Army's raw recruits extra courage.

At the banks of the river in Moscow, a group of Soviet soldiers found the corpse of a German who'd wrapped a bra around his ears as protection from the cold. The enemy suddenly looked anything but the invincible elite force they'd heard of.

Wehrmacht fled in chaos and panic

The Soviet counteroffensive in December was a disaster for the Germans. It was the first time the Wehrmacht suffered a decisive defeat. Many soldiers panicked and fled head over heels to the west. All order broke down, and forces disintegrated.

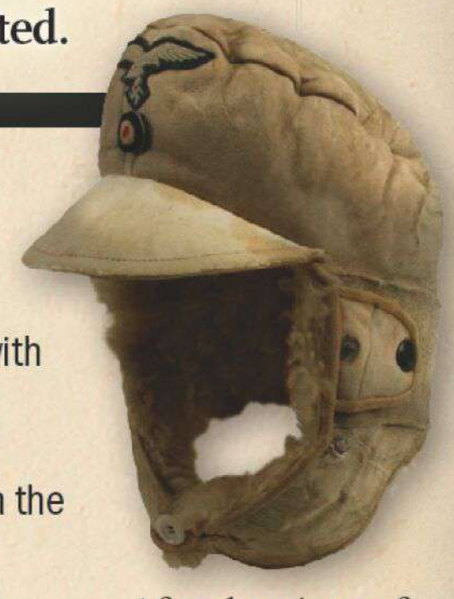
"But one misses the orderly hand of the High Command", wrote Richter drily, as his unit fled through the tangle of vehicles, discarded equipment and groups of soldiers – large and small – in full retreat.

Hitler would never come so close to Moscow as he'd been on the evening of 4th December, 1941.

PERSPECTIVE

Disaster loomed ahead

German hopes of a swift victory over the Soviet Union died after the campaign against Moscow failed. Instead, an inevitable defeat waited.

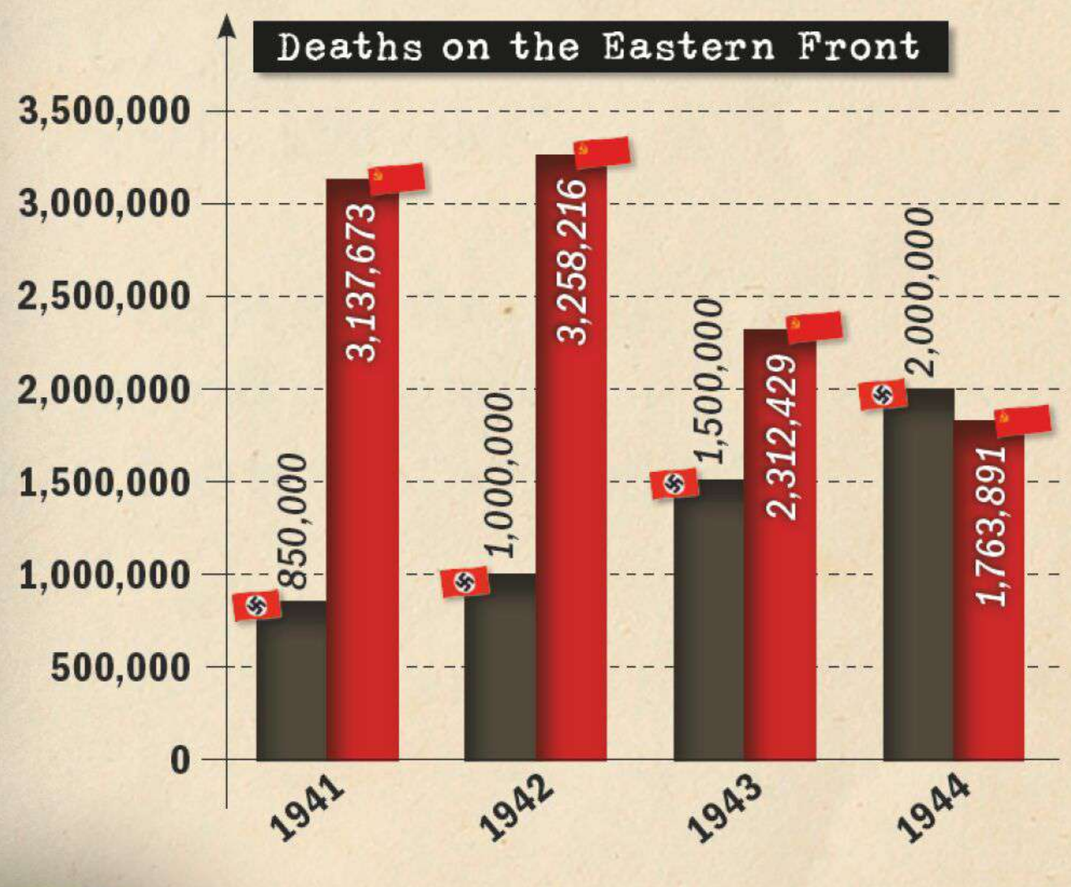


After the winter of 1941-2, Luftwaffe pilots received fur-lined hats.

The Red Army counteroffensive in the winter of 1941-42 transformed the German Blitzkrieg into a drawn-out duel. It was a showdown the Wehrmacht was doomed to lose against an army with greater reserves of manpower and raw materials.

Hitler's final defeat was still some way off in the summer of 1942, when German forces attacked on the southern front. But after further success, a bloody stalemate developed again, this time at Stalingrad.

A Soviet counterattack that winter led to a German army's surrender and the war's turning point. During the summer of 1943 the Germans again tried to take the initiative, but their attack at Kursk ended in complete failure. The German forces' offensive capacity had been exhausted – the initiative was now exclusively with Stalin.



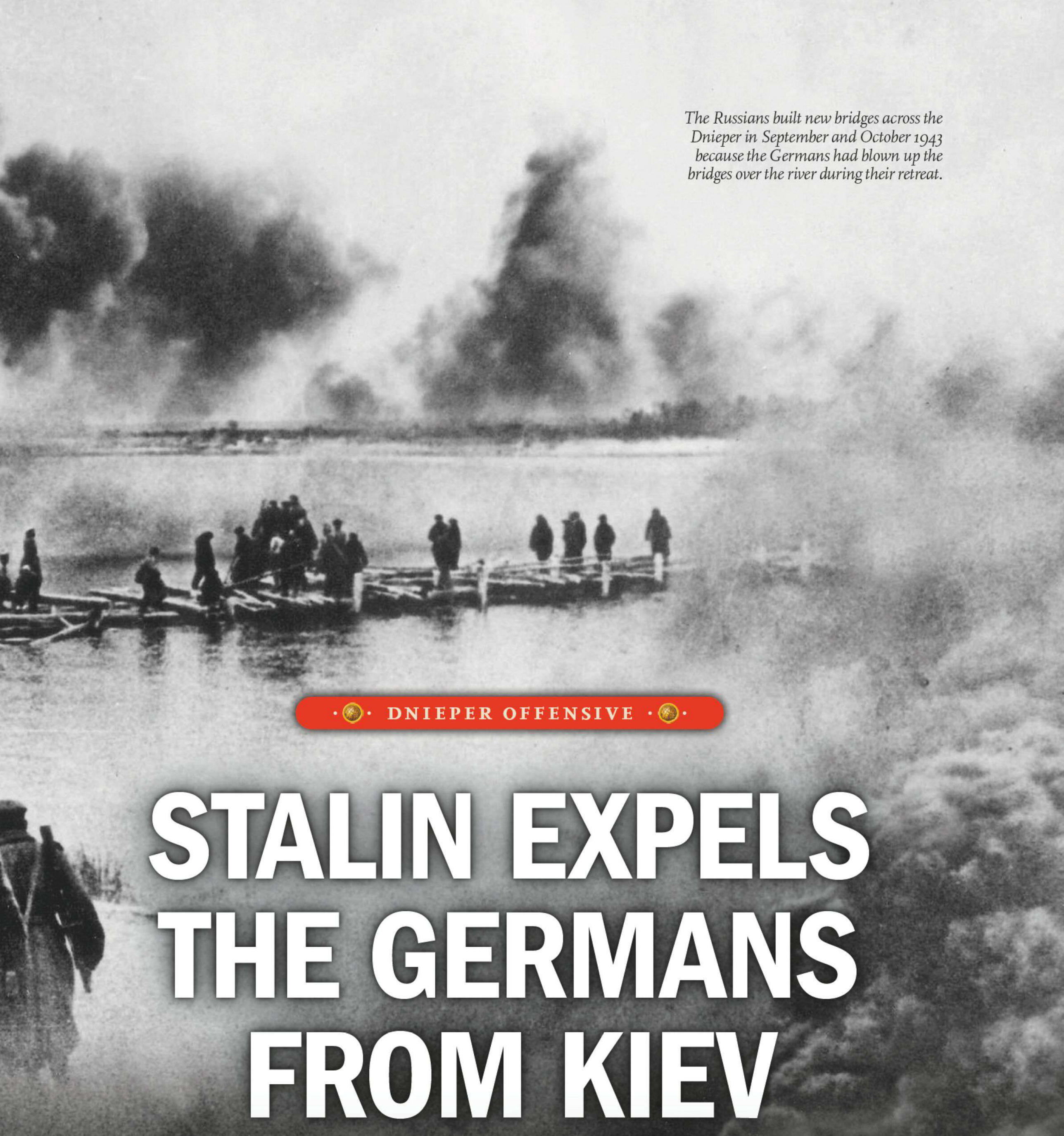


The Germans lost troops on the Eastern Front faster than they could be replaced. Instead, the ranks had to be filled with boys.



1943

SEPTEMBER



The Russians built new bridges across the Dnieper in September and October 1943 because the Germans had blown up the bridges over the river during their retreat.

DNIEPER OFFENSIVE

STALIN EXPELS THE GERMANS FROM KIEV

After the Russian victories at Stalingrad and Kursk in the first half of 1943, Stalin is ready to follow up his successes with a massive offensive. Hitler puts his faith in the wide river Dnieper, where his troops entrench on the western bank to prevent the Red Army from conquering Kiev.

Eastern Front, 1943

THE STAGE IS SET



In September 1943 Hitler pulls his hard-pressed troops back on the Eastern Front, where they entrench on the west bank of the river Dnieper. When Stalin gives the Red Army orders to seize Kiev before the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution on 7th November, German troops on the Dnieper face a furious Russian onslaught.

THE NOISE IN KIEV WAS DEAFENING in mid-September 1943. Two years of Nazi occupation had forever drained the Soviet Union's third largest city, reducing its population by 700,000. Now, however, the Ukrainian capital was filling by the hour with German troops from the Eastern Front. Heavy vehicles clogged up the streets and the city's military engineers were busy placing concrete blocks to halt the advance of enemy tanks. The Germans moved guns into position behind the defences, stacking up tonnes of sand bags to screen the powerful machine guns designed to stop the Red Army.

In Kiev's eastern district where the deep Dnieper River flowed, heavy tanks clattered over bridges. The metal meeting asphalt produced a crushing sound that cut through the ears of the troops who were also crossing the river. When the last soldiers from the battlefields had crossed into Kiev, gigantic explosions could be heard as bridges crashed into the water, shattered by German detonations.

Things were the same both north and south of the Ukrainian capital – German Panzer tanks and truckloads of infantry crossed the Dnieper to its west bank to establish solid positions to form a defensive wall in Ukraine. Although the line was over 1,000 kilometres long, the Nazis felt well equipped to withstand the Russian war machine. In an effort to avoid heavy fighting, German planes flew over the enemy's forward positions and dropped thousands of leaflets in an attempt to deter the Red Army: "Germany has clad the west bank of the Dnieper in concrete and shod it with iron... Death awaits you on the Dnieper. Stop before it is too late", the warning sounded.

Russian Nikolai Vatutin didn't think much of the Germans' intimidation campaign as he read the flyer a number of kilometres from Kiev. The plump Russian, commander of the 1st Ukrainian Front, screwed up the pamphlet and continued towards the Dnieper. The general had a deadline. Stalin had proclaimed that Kiev should be taken before 7th November. And Vatutin had no intention of disappointing his leader.

HITLER ACCEPTED RETREAT RELUCTANTLY

In the months leading up to the German entrenchment along the Dnieper, the Red Army had first beaten back the Germans at Kursk, and then followed it up with another victory at Kharkov on 24th August, 1943. The day after, Stalin's general staff met and planned a major offensive against the weakened Germans. The Russians were sure that the enemy would try to build defensive positions along the Dnieper, and therefore the Red Army would need to rapidly advance to ensure the Germans didn't have time to establish an effective line of defence. On arrival at the river the Russians would attack on a wide front, so they could cross the Dnieper in many places at the same time and thus keep the enemy under pressure.

Finally, the general staff agreed that when Dnieper's west bank was under Russian control, they would attack the central railway lines and main towns – primarily Kiev, which Stalin



Red Army soldiers sailed weapons and other equipment across the river in makeshift rafts.

insisted his troops would liberate by 7th November, 1943 to mark the 26th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution under Lenin in 1917.

German Field Marshal Erich von Mainstein shared the Russian officers' view that the only sensible option following the German setbacks was a retreat to the Dnieper. Unfortunately the commander of Army Group South came up against a belligerent Hitler when the two met in central Ukraine in late August. Hitler refused to budge and demanded that the troops hold their position; he, as usual, imagined that the Russians would have to give up the fight soon.

Some weeks later, when the German position at the Eastern Front had still not improved, von Manstein managed to convince the stubborn Führer that a natural defence line along the Dnieper River could effectively block Russian armoured tanks. Since the Dnieper is over 300 metres wide – and even up to 700 metres in some places – it was immensely suitable as a line of defence. The enemy would find it difficult to transport supplies to the opposite bank, and if a truck or tank ended up in the deep water, the vehicle would never resurface. Most places along the river's western bank were also high, so if the Russians finally penetrated the Dnieper, they would have to fight their way up steep slopes.

Hitler accepted von Manstein's argument reluctantly – the most important thing was that the Russians did not conquer the whole of Ukraine. The southern part of the Soviet Union was vital for the Germans, as the area was rich in grains, and the subsoil contained iron ore and coal – essential products if the huge German war machine was to keep running.

The Germans looted as they retreated

On 14th September, von Manstein ordered his troops on the southern Eastern Front to withdraw to the Dnieper. The soldiers, who were exhausted after heavy fighting, breathed a sigh of relief. The troops also realised that the enemy had both more men and artillery, while the Germans at the front were only being reinforced in piecemeal fashion.

A total of 1.2 million Germans began the retreat. The lucky ones got spaces in trucks or trains, while others dragged themselves along the gravel Ukrainian roads. However, everyone had to make frequent stops as von Manstein had ordered that every green area should be plundered.

"The food situation at home makes it essential that the troops should as far as possible be fed off the land and that furthermore the largest possible stocks should be placed at the disposal of the homeland", the order stated.

200,000 cattle, 270,000 sheep, 153,000 horses and 40,000 truckloads of food were stolen from the already starving farmers in the Donetsk region in eastern Ukraine. In September a total of 2,942 trains ran supplies along with the wounded and evacuated to the western bank of the Dnieper.

But the German troops also had orders to follow a scorched earth policy. Everything that might be of use to the enemy should be destroyed. The result of the tactics was clear to the Red Army soldiers who hunted the Germans.

"Mile after mile of devastation and misery: the Germans were certainly very good at this job. In numerous villages, barns and storage facilities were burnt down, the grain silos blown up and farmers left without grain to tide them over to the next harvest. The Germans set fire to houses and shot any inhabitants who resisted", Russian Private Gabriel Temkin wrote in his diary.

At the same Soviet soldiers were greeted by Ukrainians as liberators, listening to their reports of German atrocities during the prolonged occupation. Some Ukrainians were emaciated having lived on grass for weeks. For Russian war correspondent Vasily Grossman, who followed on the heels of General Vatutin's troops, it became clear that the army's hatred of the enemy had flared up during the march:

"Every soldier, every officer and every general of the Red Army who had seen the Ukraine in blood and fire, who had heard the true story of what had happened in the Ukraine during the two years of German rule, understands to the bottom of their soul that there are only two sacred words left to us. One of them is 'love', and the other one is 'revenge'". In



Brass buttons adorned the Russian officers' uniforms.

NAME ERICH VON MANSTEIN
TITLE COMMANDER, ARMY GROUP SOUTH
1887-1973

German genius argued with Hitler

Von Manstein was one of the few German officers who expressed his disagreement with Hitler when the two met. This kind of insubordination usually led to dismissal, but the Führer had so much respect for von Manstein's achievements and tactical abilities that the field marshal was allowed to remain in his post. In 1944, however, von Manstein was dismissed because he had argued for a sharp retreat on the Eastern Front.



- Fought on the Western Front in WWI.
- Went to prison for 18 years after the war.

NAME NICHOLAS VATUTIN
TITLE GENERAL
1901-1944

Peasant was feared army leader

Nicholas Vatutin was born into a poor peasant family and joined the Communist Party in 1920. As a General, Vatutin played a key role in the Battle of Kursk with his extremely offensive tactics. These tactics cost many of his soldiers' lives because they had to advance at a ferocious pace. On the other hand, his achievements spoke for themselves, while Stalin admired Vatutin. The general became one of the Germans' most feared opponents.



- Received the highest Russian order.
- Was assassinated in 1944.



The "Hero of the Soviet Union" Order was the country's highest honour. 11,635 people received it during the war.

pursuit of von Manstein's forces, Russians thundered further west in the direction of the Dnieper River.

Dead animals lay everywhere

Stalin's commanders were eager to stick to their schedule and give the Germans as little time as possible to retreat to Dnieper's west bank. But the frantic pace had its price. The horses that pulled supplies were too tired to eat their hay and collapsed. Dead animals with flies around them lay along the roadside when the troops bringing up the rear passed. The consequence was that many units lacked both food and essential supplies.

By the end of September, they could see the glistening waters of the Dnieper River. For the advance forces, rifles and guns were enough to attack the few unfortunate German soldiers who had not crossed the western side of the river before the Dnieper's five usable bridges had been blown up.

The men panicked and leaving everything on the bank threw themselves into the grey water trying to swim to the opposite side and safety. Guns and shells exploded around them as they desperately tried to reach land.

Incidents like this helped to remind the Germans that they were far from safe behind the defence line. Although the Wehrmacht had established kilometre-long defensive positions along the Dnieper's main points, the meandering river ran over 1,000 kilometres through the Ukrainian countryside and it was virtually impossible to defend every stone along its banks – not least when the Red Army stormed towards the river with no less than 2,600,000 vengeful men. But even though the German soldiers were concerned, Hitler was optimistic about the situation: "Sooner will the Dnieper flow backwards than will the Russians overcome it", said the Führer, who was now reconciled to the idea of withdrawal. Words were one thing, however: the reality was something different.

Russians sailed on rafts

General Vatutin's enormous forces did not all reach the Dnieper simultaneously, but due to the pressure of Stalin's deadline, Russian officers didn't hesitate to direct units towards the west bank. Rather than wait for pontoons or other regulated means of transport, the soldiers threw themselves into the fast-flowing river on rafts or tried to swim across, while their heavy, wet clothes pulled them under the water.

If the soldiers were lucky local partisans sailed them over in small craft or fishing boats, where there was also room for artillery weapons. Other men floated guns across on rafts while they swam alongside. Despite a barrage of German artillery and mortar fire, machine gun bullets that whipped across the surface of the water and the »



Armed with a Shpagin PCA-41 submachine gun, a Russian infantry soldier fires on the Germans during the Battle of the Dnieper.

Germans had to give up holding the 1,000-kilometre front

The Dnieper was one of WWII's largest theatres of war with nearly four million soldiers spread over a front more than 1,000 kilometres long. Over four months, the Red Army pushed the Germans back and ended up securing a firm foothold along the western bank of the Dnieper River.

5 The Red Army crosses Kerch

2nd November, 1943: the Russians cross the Kerch Strait and go ashore in the Crimea. Later in November, from the peninsula's north side, the Red Army attack the German 17th Army that has retreated to Crimea.



Evacuation of 17th Army from Kerch to the Crimea began on 7th September.

4 Operation fails

25th October, 1943: 50 Russian divisions try to surround German units by establishing beachheads at both Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporizhia, but the operation fails. The Russians lose 15,000 men during the operation.



Tigers from the German Panzer Corps took part in the Battle of the Dnieper.

6 Kiev falls

6th November, 1943: the day before the anniversary of the revolution in 1917 the Russians occupy Kiev, and Stalin celebrates victory with gun salutes in Moscow. Only 200,000 of the city's 900,000 inhabitants return after two years of German occupation. The rest had died or have fled.

7 The attack continues

10th December, 1943: the Red Army conquers an important railway junction at Znamianka. Four days later Russian troops also occupy the city of Cherkasy. The Russians now control almost all the major cities on the west bank of the river Dnieper.


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The New York Times.

LATE CITY EDITION

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1943.

THREE CENTS

3 RUSSIAN FORCES CROSS DNIEPER; NEVEL TAKEN IN DRIVE ON LATVIA; 8TH ARMY REPELS ATTACK IN ITALY

RED ARMY'S OFFENSIVE BEGINS TO ROLL AGAIN

NATORS PLEAD CLEAR POLICY WAR AND PEACE

MOVES ARE CRITICIZED

BRITISH HALT TANKS

8th Army Smashes Fierce German Counter-Attack Above Termoli

FIFTH ARMY NEARS CAPUA

Is Reported Within Three Miles of Volturno River Line—Allied Fliers Rake Foe

NEW SOVIET PUSH

Nazis in Dnieper 'Loop' Imperiled by Vast Wheeling Tactics

TAMAN BEING MOPPED UP

Battle on 1,500-Mile Scale Finds Foe Countering Hotly —Leningrad Drive Gains

Three Powers Bar 'Spheres,'

The news that the Red Army had crossed the Dnieper travelled around the world.



Cap worn by Lieutenant General Hans Schmidt during the defence of the Dnieper.

constant threat from fighter jets, several Russian battalions had already managed to establish the first bridgeheads by the last week of September. The Red Army forces were so numerous that, despite large losses they continued to attack the opposite bank.

On 23rd September, units from Vatutin's 1st Ukrainian Front captured a key German defence position at the city of Bukrin, barely 100 kilometres south of Kiev, although forces had not been able to transport heavy artillery or food over to the west side of the river. The capture of the defensive position was dearly bought:

"It was really frightening... So many people were killed. There were 280 new recruits in a neighbouring battalion. At the end of the battle only 16 of them were left. We were crawling around on our hands and knees, sheltering from the incessant bombings and scavenging for food", said a nurse who swam across the Dnieper to take care of the wounded.

In late September, the Red Army extended Bukrin's bridgehead to 20 kilometres wide and three kilometres deep. The Russians' success continued through to the middle of October, when they had several bridgeheads on the western side of the Dnieper. At the same time, new pontoon bridges were made so the heavy Soviet artillery could cross the river.

But Vatutin was still some way off Kiev. The city's defence against the Dnieper was too strong, so the general hoped that forces from Bukrin could push the enemy back all the way to the Ukrainian capital. The strategy was anticipated by the experienced von Manstein, however, who deployed additional armoured forces in the area. For several weeks the Red Army at Bukrin could not move forward, and pressure on Vatutin grew as 7th November approached. But the Russian had not given up. He'd hidden a trump card in his back pocket.

Vatutin cheats the enemy

Rain poured down at 22.00 on 25th October when Soviet tanks near Bukrin started their engines. The lights were shielded, so they barely lit up when the machines set off toward the pontoon bridge that led back to the Dnieper's eastern bank. Fortunately, thanks to the cloudy weather, no aircraft could spot the many tanks that slowly moved away from the Bukrin front.

3 Vatutin makes sly move

10th October, 1943: the Russians establish a bridgehead at Lyutezh on the Dnieper's west bank. On 25th October, General Vatutin transfer units to Lyutezh, so a major offensive against Kiev can be initiated from there. The operation must surprise the Germans in Kiev.

2 Russians capture Bukrin

22nd September, 1943: the first Russian troops arrive at the Dnieper River, south of Kiev. The day after, they manage to occupy the German defence position at Bukrin on the western bank of the Dnieper. Over one week the Russians expand their bridgehead, so it is 20 kilometres long and three kilometres wide.

1 Soviet offensive kicks off

23rd August, 1943: Russian forces capture Kharkov and continue the offensive in a westerly direction. On 14th September, Hitler accepts his troops' must retreat and establish a defensive line of 1,000 kilometres along the River Dnieper.

Russian troops clung firmly to the bridgeheads they established on the Dnieper's west bank.

Some days earlier, Army Command in Bukrin received a message from Vatutin ordering the transfer of troops in Bukrin to Lyutezh 25 kilometres north of Kiev, where the Russians had established a beachhead earlier in the month: "Make the march in absolute secrecy, move only at night... Categorically prohibit radio transmission. Conduct no telephone conversations concerning the move", the general's order stated.

Vatutin's daring plan was to surprise von Manstein by assembling a powerful army at Lyutezh, where the Germans weren't expecting an attack. In the days leading up to 25th October, troops at Bukrin had slaved away producing fake tanks to bluff the enemy. Timber frames had been cobbled together and covered with soil so that they looked like tanks from the air. At the same time, normal radio communications continued in Bukrin as the forces secretly moved away, so the Germans had no inkling something was afoot. Every night during the redeployment the remaining soldiers in Bukrin went around and lit hundreds of bonfires, so it looked as if the Russian camp was still full of Red Army troops.



Soldiers who participated in the capture at Bukrin were given a medal.

Night after night in late October, tanks and trucks filled with soldiers rolled quietly through the large forests towards Lyutezh. In addition to the constant cloud cover and the dense rain, the treetops veiled the heavy vehicles that were unable to make the 200-kilometre journey in a single night. They hid deep in the forest when daybreak broke and German reconnaissance planes had better vision. On 28th October, 200 tanks, 150 self-propelled guns, 500 tractors and 3,500 other vehicles were moved to venues east of the Dnieper, and over the following three nights they rolled the last dangerous stretch of road over two pontoon bridges to the bridgehead at Lyutezh. The enemy aircraft could not bomb the crossings as they were constantly hidden in a cloud of dense smoke generated by Soviet smoke cannons.

On 2nd November the scam was complete. A huge army stood ready on the Dnieper's west bank north of Kiev, where the Germans didn't feel at all threatened. Russian tanks and guns were now no more than 10 kilometres from Kiev.

Russian troops captured a broken Kiev

While Vatutin's tanks had dim lighting and sound during the redeployment, the situation was reversed on the morning of 3rd November, when the Red Army attacked Kiev from Lyutezh. The vehicles' lights were set to maximum strength, and the Russians mounted audio amplifiers on the tanks to frighten the enemy as much as possible. The Red Army had also set up several rows of guns across a large area outside the city, which fired shells at the German soldiers' defences.

Behind the barricades in Kiev, the Germans could see the enemy approaching through their binoculars, and in the days that followed an intense battle for supremacy raged over the city.

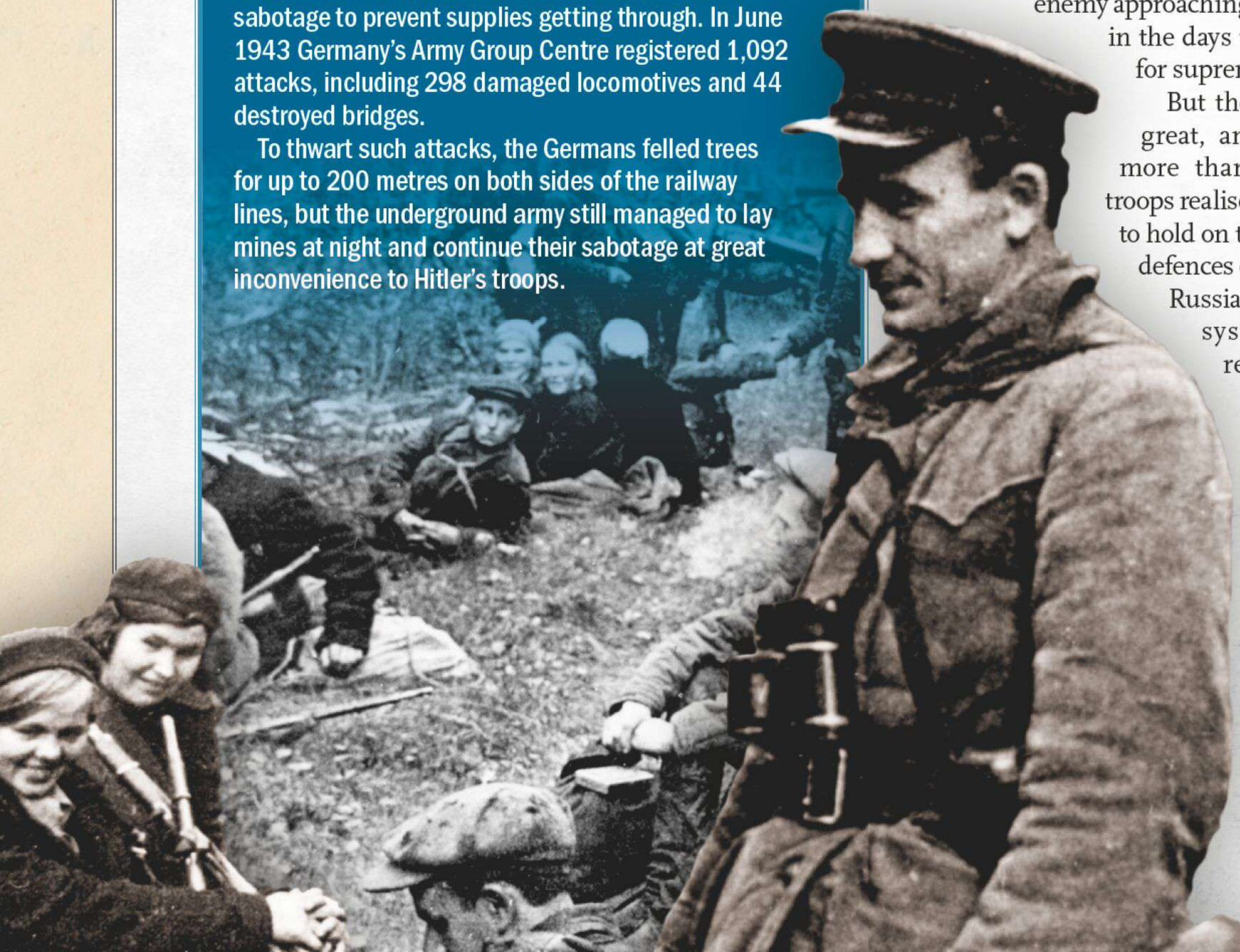
But the Soviets' superiority was too great, and after fighting fiercely for more than two days, von Manstein's troops realised that it was no longer possible to hold on to the Ukrainian capital. While defences on the city's north side kept the Russians back, the Germans began to systematically destroy the remnants of Kiev – 940 government buildings, 800 factories and 140 schools were torched on 5th November. The water supply was put out of operation, and when the last German forces withdrew from the city at night on 6th November, Kiev's ancient

Partisans paved the way for the Red Army

Soviet partisans harassed the German army behind the front line by sabotaging vital supply lines and transport.

In 1943 the Soviet partisan movement played a significant role in Russia's struggle against the German army. One of the partisans' task was to perform acts of sabotage to prevent supplies getting through. In June 1943 Germany's Army Group Centre registered 1,092 attacks, including 298 damaged locomotives and 44 destroyed bridges.

To thwart such attacks, the Germans felled trees for up to 200 metres on both sides of the railway lines, but the underground army still managed to lay mines at night and continue their sabotage at great inconvenience to Hitler's troops.



Partisans helped the Red Army with both sabotage and direct attacks on the Germans.

churches were in ruins, and the city's conservatory, university and power station had been burned to the ground.

At 04.00, the first Russian tanks rolled over the rubble in northern Kiev, and soon the city was swarming with Soviet soldiers. The surviving inhabitants gradually crept out from of hiding and considered their surroundings with mixed feelings. For the first time in two years, Kiev was not occupied – but the town was destroyed beyond recognition.

Stalin gained control of the Dnieper

For Vatutin the conquest of Kiev, however, was a great victory regardless of the city's state. Germans were forced out of the largest occupied city in the Soviet Union, and it had happened just before the big anniversary of the Revolution. The victory was celebrated with gun salutes in Moscow where Stalin also took the opportunity to commemorate fallen comrades and send a fierce message to the enemy: "Eternal glory to those who fell in the struggle for liberation and independence of our country. Death to the German invaders!"

In early December, the Red Army secured a solid foothold on the western bank of the Dnieper. In addition to Kiev, important bridgeheads in Cherkasy and Dnipropetrovsk were established, and in the far south Russians stormed the Crimean Peninsula. The rapid advance came at a price: under the Dnieper Offensive Russians lost about 3,500 men a day.

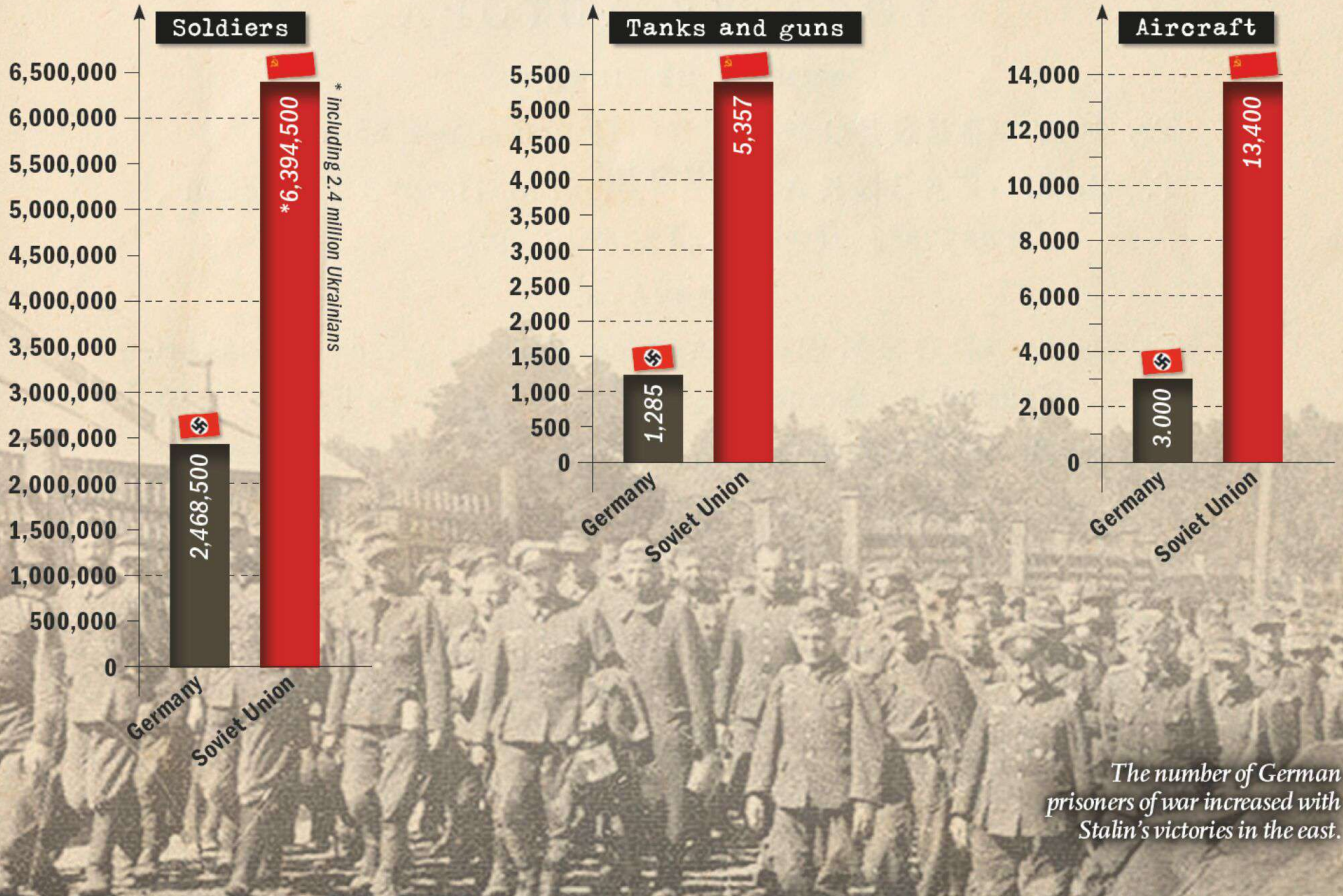
In four months, the Russians pushed the Germans back more than 250 kilometres over a 1,000-kilometre front, allowing the Red Army to recapture an area the size of Great Britain. As 1943 drew to a close, Stalin could look back on a year in which his troops had managed to do irreparable harm to the German invaders, while he himself became more and more convinced that victory was on the horizon.

PERSPECTIVE

Soviets remained strong after the conquest of the Dnieper

Although Russian losses during the Dnieper offensive were greater than the Germans, Stalin's forces remained the stronger at the campaign's end in December 1943. His huge losses were sustainable because the Russians had enormous reserves in the form of soldiers, equipment and weapons.

The military balance of power after the Dnieper Offensive

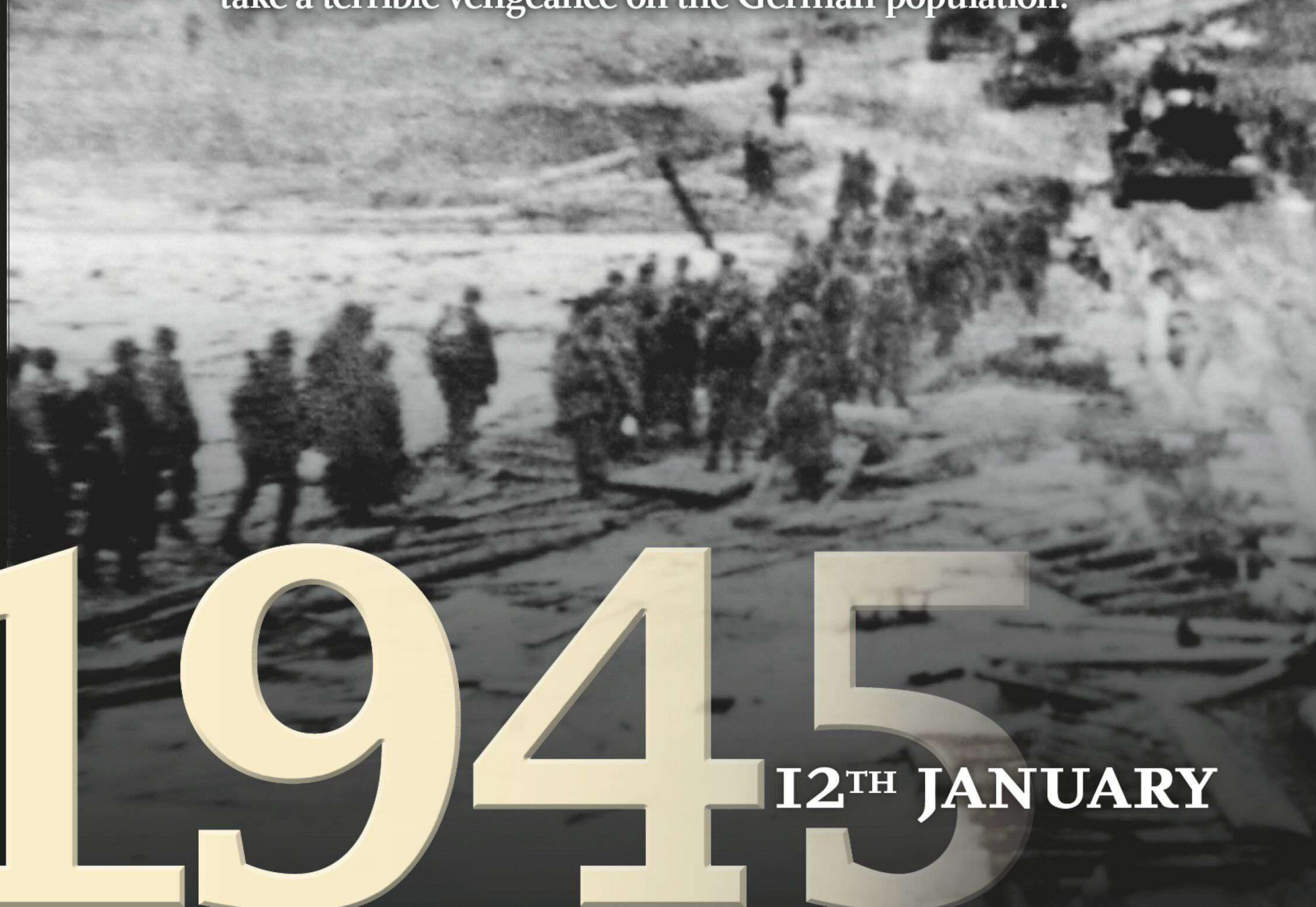


The number of German prisoners of war increased with Stalin's victories in the east.

VISTULA-ODER OFFENSIVE

THE RED ARMY STRIKES A DECISIVE BLOW

In January 1945, over two million Russian soldiers head west from positions on the Vistula River and the East Prussian border. Stalin's taken the decisive step into the Third Reich and now targets the country's capital. En route, Russian soldiers will take a terrible vengeance on the German population.



1945

12TH JANUARY

A Red Army tank crosses the River Oder in February 1945, while Russian soldiers who have been relieved at the Front march in the opposite direction.

Poland, 1945

THE STAGE IS SET



In early 1945, the Red Army stands on the west bank of the Polish river Vistula after a two-year push. Soldiers await permission to advance through Poland and into Germany. On 12th January the order comes from Stalin and the Russians move towards the sparsely occupied German positions.

THE SUN HAD NOT YET RISEN, but in the darkness, the soldiers in Marshal Ivan Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front could see their breath forming small clouds in the bitter cold. Comrades pulled up their collars to protect their necks and chins from the driving snow as they towed guns into position. There were bridgeheads all along the Front at Baranów, 230 kilometres south of Warsaw, and the snow had been compressed by heavy artillery to create a slippery surface that caused problems for the soldiers in their clumsy army boots. It had been a long wait on the west side of the Vistula River, but now in the early morning of 12th January, the Red Army was ready to attack German positions.

The Russian artillery was packed tightly along the Front, with up to 300 guns per kilometre. At 04.35, the guns rained shells down on the German forces that were entrenched in three defensive lines, one behind the other.

After half an hour's bombardment, the Soviet battalions stormed the German trenches, shooting anyone who survived the inferno. Specialist units scouted behind enemy lines to try and identify surviving strongholds. Their observations were sent directly back to Konev's artillery units, which targeted a new volley of shells directly at those positions. German officers were left in despair:

"I began the operation with an understrength battalion", German battalion commander Reinhardt Müller said later. "After the smoke of the Soviet preparation cleared... I had only a platoon of combat-effective soldiers left".

As day dawned in his bunker on the Baranów Front, Müller was aware that he and his countrymen on the Polish defence line would find it increasingly difficult to keep the Red Army at bay. The Russians had begun their onslaught against the



German motherland, and the countdown to the Third Reich's collapse had begun.

Stalin headed to the Oder River

The Russians had captured the bridgehead at Baranów back in the late summer of 1944, towards the end of Operation Bagration. The Red Army had expelled the Germans from Belarus and eastern Poland, and Russian soldiers had crossed the Vistula – Poland's largest river – at several points, seizing important bridgeheads south of Warsaw. Since Bagration, the Front had remained relatively quiet, but German generals were in no doubt that it would not be long before the guns were rumbling again on the Eastern Front.

Stalin, however, wanted to postpone the attack until the cold winter had frozen the ground like cement. This would allow Russian T34 tanks to easily roll out to the Oder River and finally penetrate Germany. This meant that the so-called Vistula-Oder Offensive could not kick off before January 1945. Until then, the Red Army would move their forces and equipment to the three bridgeheads on the Vistula's West Bank, from where the attack would begin.

The deployment followed the maskirovka ("masking") strategy to mislead the enemy. Tanks and mobile artillery crept up to the Front under the cover of night with thousands of trucks full of ammunition and supplies. At the same time, the Russians tried to fool the Germans into focusing on an area north of Warsaw through fake radio messages and by establishing a ghost army consisting of 1,000 imitation tanks and other vehicles.

The Nazis' intelligence service – the Abwehr – was in no doubt that the Red Army would soon launch an

NAME **IVAN STEPANOVICH KONEV** 1897-1973

TITLE MARSHAL, COMMANDER OF 1ST UKRAINIAN FRONT

Lumberjack was Stalin's super warrior

With little schooling, Ivan Konev joined the army at 18. 10 years later, after becoming an officer, his military career gained momentum. Konev was given a significant role in the defence of Moscow and other offensives following the Battle of Stalingrad. He was admired for his frequent use of dummy manoeuvres and ended up as one of Stalin's favourite generals.

- **Was a lumberjack before entering the military.**
- **Was Deputy Defence Minister in 1946.**



NAME **FERDINAND SCHÖRNER** 1892-1973

TITLE COLONEL GENERAL, CHIEF OF ARMY GROUP A

Top Nazi treated soldiers brutally

Ferdinand Schörner was a staunch Nazi who ended the war one of Hitler's favourite officers. The Führer particularly valued Schörner's strict handling of his troops, especially during the Vistula-Oder offensive. The general was hard on malingerers and soldiers who left their post. Without trial, deserters were hanged along the roadside as a warning to other Germans.

- **Was nicknamed "Bloody Ferdinand".**
- **Was imprisoned in West Germany in 1958.**



"The Eastern Front is like a pack of cards"

Colonel General Heinz Guderian during an audience with Hitler

When the ice began to melt, heavy weapons became stuck in the mud. Here, Russian soldiers saved an anti-tank gun on the Oder.

The Red Army stormed toward the German capital

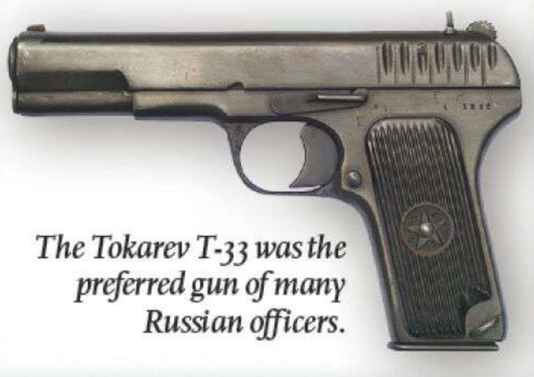
The Vistula-Oder offensive was the central thrust of the Russian winter offensive in 1945, but was supplemented by attacks in East Prussia and Pomerania. Three weeks after the operation launched, the Red Army stood just 70 kilometres from Berlin.

6 Stalin prepares for an attack on Berlin

31st March: the Red Army has established a strong, wide front on the Oder. With the flanks secured prior to the march on Berlin, Stalin gives orders to Konev and Zhukov to prepare the offensive against the German capital.

5 Russians on the Oder river

31st January: Zhukov's troops reach the Oder river. The Red Army is just 70 kilometres from Berlin, but Stalin does not want the army to continue towards the German capital before the troops have formed a long front along the Oder.



The Tokarev T-33 was the preferred gun of many Russian officers.

4 Polish cities are freed

From 17th to 19th January: German troops evacuate the Polish capital, Warsaw; over the next two days Kraków and Lódz fall into Russian hands.

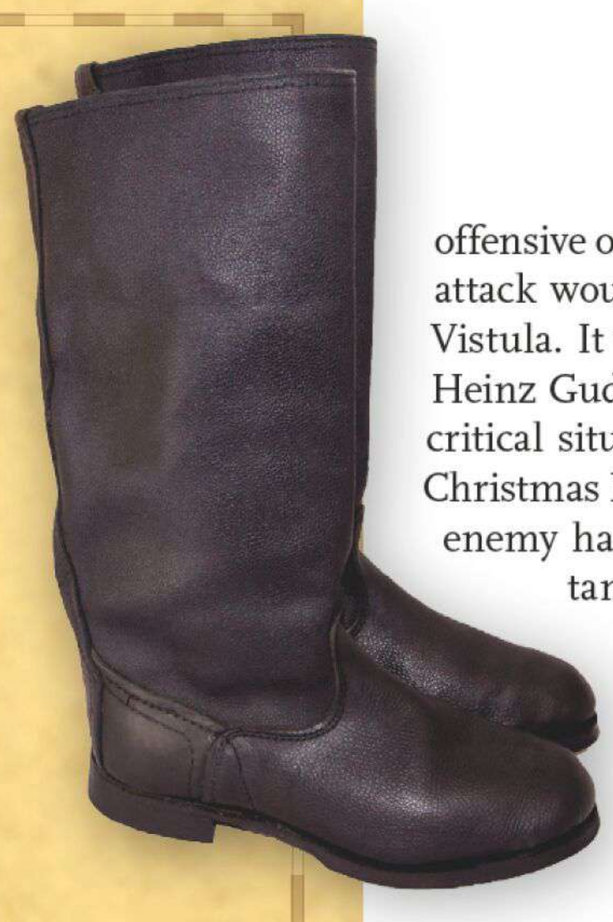
3 Zhukov's advance picks up speed

14th January: at 08:30 Marshal Georgy Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front attacks Magnuszew and Pulawy. An initial bombardment helps Russians advance 30 kilometres on the first day.

Oder was the target for the Russian's winter offensive.

Baltic Sea
Königsberg
Gdansk
Kolberg
East Prussia
Pomerania
Stettin
Vistula
Poland
Küstrin
Berlin
Germany
Frankfurt an der Oder
Poznan
Oder
Warta
Warsaw
Lódz
Magnuszew
Dresden
Breslau
Silesia
Baranów
Oder
Vistula
Prague
Kraków
Bohemia and Moravia

Vehicles from the Red Army cross the Vistula River near Warsaw on 18th January, 1945.



A lack of leather forced the Russians to produce their Sapogi – or high – boots from imitation leather known as Kirza SK. By the end of the war, around 10 million soldiers were wearing the boots.

offensive on the Eastern Front, and that the obvious point of attack would be the bridgeheads on the west bank of the Vistula. It was the job of Generaloberst (Colonel General) Heinz Guderian, Chief of Staff of the Army, to present the critical situation to Hitler at the Führer's headquarters on Christmas Eve, 1944. Guderian and his men believed that the enemy had 11 times more infantry, seven times as many tanks and an air force 20 times greater than the Wehrmacht could mobilise.

"It's the greatest imposture since Genghis Khan!" Hitler shouted before dismissing the report completely. "Who's responsible for producing all this rubbish?"

No significant redeployment of troops occurred. Hitler wasn't persuaded in the New Year either when General Josef Harpe, commander of Army Group A on the Wisla Front, asked for permission to pull his advanced positions back to safer lines. The Führer refused to accept the Russians' superiority, and remain unmoved even when – on 9th January – Guderian delivered one final bleak assessment when he met up with Hitler again: "The Eastern Front is like a pack of cards", Guderian argued. "If the front is broken through at one point all the rest will collapse".

Konev broke through Baranów

Just three days later, on 12th January, the load-bearing card came crashing down when Marshal Konev broke through the bridgehead at Baranów and crushed the Germans' triple line of defence. The headquarters of the German 4th Panzer Army was destroyed by noon, and when the Russian infantry stormed the trenches and rubble, the surviving Germans fled in panic from their positions. Meanwhile, Konev's 4th Tank Army crashed through the area's snowy forests, and by the afternoon the Wehrmacht was forced back almost 20 kilometres.

The situation was aggravated further by Josef Harpe's forces along the Vistula's defence line when the Red Army opened a new front on the bridgeheads Pulawy and Magnuszew just south of Warsaw. With the same efficiency as Konev's troops delivered, Georgy Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front bombarded its way

SOVIET UNION

1 Konev uses artillery to crush defence

12th January: Marshal Ivan Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front launches a massive bombardment from its bridgehead at Baranów on German defensive positions at 04:35. The Germans quickly withdraw.

2 Russians invade East Prussia

13th January: The 3rd Belorussian Front initiates the Soviet offensive in East Prussia, later joined by the 2nd Belorussian Front. Many of the region's 3.5 million German civilians begin a frenzied escape to the west.

PULAWY

0 50 100 150 200 250 km

The Front ran along the Vistula to the south until the winter offensive.

Georgy Zhukov

SOVIET UNION	
SOLDIERS:	2,203,000
AIRCRAFT:	5,000
GUNS:	21,212

GERMANY	
SOLDIERS:	450,000
AIRCRAFT:	270
GUNS:	5,250

Russians copied enemy equipment

Throughout the war, the Russians improved their weapons, uniforms and other equipment by copying enemy designs. By spring 1945, the Red Army was well-equipped.



"Ushanka" fur hat with flaps that protected ears from the cold.

"Telogreika" body warmer jacket was padded with cotton wool.

PPSh-41 submachine gun, had magazine with 35 bullets and weighed 4.3 kg.

Steel helmet, 1940 model: an improved version of the earlier 1936 model and easier to manufacture.

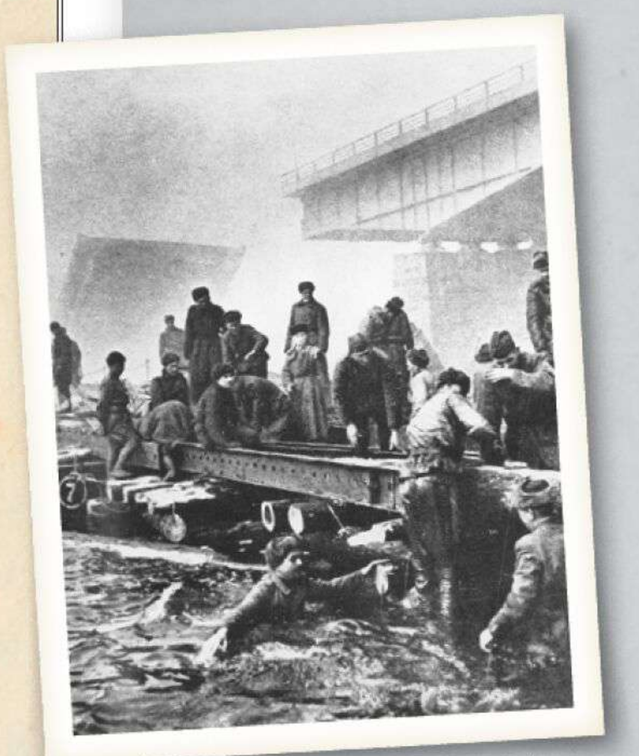
TT-30 pistol had a magazine with eight shots and a range of 50 metres.

Overcoats were part of both soldiers' and officers' winter uniforms.

Long leather boots were issued to Red Army officers after 1943.

RPG-1 anti-tank rocket was a copy of the German Panzerfaust.

UNIFORMS



Russian troops established a beachhead on the western bank of the Oder in January 1945.

through the enemy's defence on 14th January, and three days later, T34-tanks rolled into Warsaw unopposed. The Germans evacuated the Polish capital, which was unrecognisable after years of occupation and massacre. Only 162,000 of Warsaw's original 1.31 million inhabitants remained.

Russians only thought of revenge

As the Vistula-Oder offensive swept across Poland, Soviet forces also penetrated north into East Prussia, where about 3.5 million Germans lived. It was vital to secure the Vistula-Oder offensive's northern flank to prevent a German attack on Zhukov and Konev's oncoming troops from the north. At the same time, a Russian campaign in East Prussia and Pomerania closed Hitler's supply ports in the Baltic Sea.

For German civilians, the sound of Russian guns was a signal to flee quickly. Propaganda Minister Goebbels had warned his countrymen that enemy soldiers were barbarian hordes only interested in destruction and revenge. Therefore,

"You are now on German soil. The hour of revenge has struck!"

Russian propaganda poster in East Prussia

hundreds of thousands of Prussians packed their most important belongings in small carts and walked towards the Oder and Berlin. Elderly people, women and children dragged themselves through the freezing snow in temperatures of -30 degrees.

The propaganda machine in Moscow did everything possible to provoke the Red Army into living up to its fearsome reputation. It promoted vengeance on the back of the German army's atrocities during the invasion of the Soviet Union. Millions of Russian soldiers and civilians were killed by Hitler's troops, who had also decimated Russian cities by destroying millions of buildings, including 84,000 schools and 40,000 hospitals.

Russian propaganda always referred to Berlin as "the lair of the fascist beast", and when soldiers crossed the border into Germany, they were greeted by posters reading "Soldier: You are now on German soil. The hour of revenge has struck!"

Hatred of the Germans escalated. "A couple of times, when entering houses, we found old people in them who had been murdered by our troops. Once I found a woman lying on a bed with a bayonet in her chest. What had happened to her? We left without asking", said Soviet scout Mikhail Baitman. He also admitted that, "Our unit made no distinction between enemy soldiers and civilians".

"The war turned us into beasts. The Germans showed us how to behave like animals, and for three years they had 'schooled us well'... Now we were following suit. I was a Jew, and I learnt all about their barbaric cruelty. I felt not a shred of pity – only hatred. A desire to kill every last one of them".

Zhukov creates a wide Front on the Oder

Within a week, Zhukov's troops had liberated Lódz, while Konev captured Kraków to the south. Two weeks later, both of the giant armies reached the German border, which twisted and turned around 70 kilometres east of the Oder.

War correspondent Vasily Grossman was hot on the heels of Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front when the troops invaded the German city of Schwerin an der Warthe. Here, soldiers tore the clothes from the town's women in front of their families.

"Women's screams are heard from open windows", recounted Grossmann, who also saw a nursing mother dragged into a barn, where Russian soldiers raped her. "Her relatives came to the barn and asked her attackers to let her have a break, because the hungry baby was crying the whole time", wrote the correspondent.



German propaganda called for soldiers to fight to the last person at Frankfurt an der Oder.

German soldiers left to defend their fellow countrymen were scared witless. They knew they were targets for the larger Soviet Army, and there were reports of German soldiers wearing women's clothes or Russian uniforms to avoid capture or death.

Hitler found their poor attempts to defend the country disgraceful, and in an attempt to halt the Russian advance he replaced Josef Harpe as Army Group A commander with Ferdinand Schörner. Schörner was chosen because he had always shown support for Hitler, but on the battlefield, he could do little with his demoralised units.

Captured treasury was completely looted

The Red Army rolled on through the winter landscape at high speed, and on 27th January Marshal Zhukov could taste victory with such certainty that he informed the Soviet High Command that the Germans no longer had a single line of defence. Army Group A was split, and four days later – on the 12th anniversary of Hitler's coming to power – soldiers from one of Zhukov's armies navigated across the ice that covered the River Oder. The creaking ice was only just thick enough to support the soldiers, and under cover of darkness they sneaked across the river and captured the town of Kienitz.

From their new position on the Oder, the Russians could almost glimpse the German capital Berlin, which was now 70 kilometres to the west. In the days before 2nd February, Zhukov established positions along the middle of the Oder.

Zhukov wanted to launch an assault on Berlin immediately, but Stalin gave the order to halt the march to the west. The rapid three-week advance from the Vistula to the Oder had led to supply issues. The Polish and German rail network tracks were narrower than Soviet ones, and military


Soldiers from a German unit defend Oder with a light machine gun.

"Their [German military units] value is shockingly low"

General Colonel Ferdinand Schörner to Hitler

engineers began to expand the tracks to allow supply trains through. And trucks rolled through the captured territory with equipment to strengthen the Front.

Traffic also flowed in the opposite direction. Convoys of trucks loaded with war booty returned eastward to the Soviet Union. Russian soldiers didn't hold back when they looted Polish and German homes taking anything of value.

"[The Germans] started this war, so it is only right that we should now take their possessions", a Russian lieutenant noted in his diary. Clocks, porcelain and fur were particularly sought after, but clothes, boxes of nails, tools and window glass were all sent to the impoverished Soviet Union too.

In March, Konev's troops managed to capture something else of great importance: the Upper Silesian Industrial Region. During the winter offensive, Stalin had specifically pointed to the spot on a map while he looked at Konev and said one word: "Gold!" The Russian occupation of the industrial area meant that Nazi Germany was cut off from vital raw materials that could keep its ailing war machine going. A German counterattack in Silesia was easily repulsed, and even the loyal Schörner had difficulty hiding his pessimism.

"I must report that the military incapacity of the German units exceeds my worst fears. Almost without exception, they're exhausted... Their value is shockingly low... My impression is that the Russians can do what they want, without much effort", stated Schörner's message to the Führer on 20th March.

With the German army falling apart and the Russians standing at the Oder near Berlin, most Germans knew that the country was defeated. Hitler refused to surrender, despite the fact that the critical situation struck deeply into his previously indomitable faith in Germany's racial superiority. It was in one of the Führer's letters to armaments minister Albert Speer where it became clear. When Speer pointed out that Hitler would be "eliminating all further possibility for the German people to survive", Hitler replied:

"This nation will have proved itself the weaker and the future will belong exclusively to the stronger Eastern nation. Those who remain alive after the battles are over are in any case only inferior persons, since the best have fallen". Hitler did not care about his country's fate and had no desire to spare Germans who hadn't lived up to his ideals.

From their posts on the Oder, the Russians prepared a decisive campaign into "the lair of the fascist beast" in Berlin: and the German people wouldn't be spared this time either.



Concentration camp prisoners leaving Auschwitz, supported by a Russian military doctor.

Konev's soldiers liberated Auschwitz

The Red Army reached Auschwitz concentration camp in January 1945. Many of the soldiers had difficulty coping with meeting the victims.

Konev's forces would never forget the sight that greeted them in southern Poland on 27th January, 1945. After the troops had moved through the snowy forests, they came to the concentration camp at Auschwitz, which had recently been abandoned by evacuated personnel.

There were 3,000 prisoners left there, many resembling living skeletons. The Russians found many couldn't be saved – those dying adding to the 1.1 million already killed at the camp by the Nazis.

Soviet commander Anatoly Shapiro recalled what he saw when he first arrived: "When I opened the barrack, I saw blood, dead people, and in between them, women still alive and naked. It stank; you couldn't stay a second... The soldiers from my battalion asked me, 'Let us go. We can't stay. This is unbelievable' ... People in the barracks were naked, or [had] just thin clothes, no shoes, in the freezing cold; it was January".

Stalin hesitated to attack Berlin

Stalin wanted to reinforce his flanks and control the area around the Oder before he would countenance an offensive against Berlin. The first order to storm the German capital came in April.

Although Marshal Zhukov wanted to continue towards Berlin in February, the Red Army had to wait over two months before the soldiers were unleashed on the German capital. The advance north through East Prussia and Pomerania was not as quick as the Vistula-Oder offensive, as Stalin wanted to reinforce the line along the Oder before the Russians began their final assault on Berlin.

In principle Stalin's decision was the right one. Zhukov's rapid advance of over 450 kilometres in just three weeks had left pockets of German resistance in Poland. And although the 1st Belorussian Front had reached the Oder, their force stood alone by the river. The city of Poznan was surrounded, but was only taken after a Russian attack on 23rd February. Zhukov received the order to turn north and head into Pomerania, so the Russians could form a wide front along the Oder. Then the Red Army conquered both Danzig and Konigsberg, cutting off the Germans' access to the Baltic Sea.

Konev's advance in Silesia to the south meant all flanks were secured by April, while Russian forces had quelled most of the remaining German pockets. Stalin now controlled a wide front and by 16th April, 1945 was ready to start storming Berlin. The short Vistula-Oder offensive had cost the Russians heavy losses:

43,476 killed and missing Russian soldiers

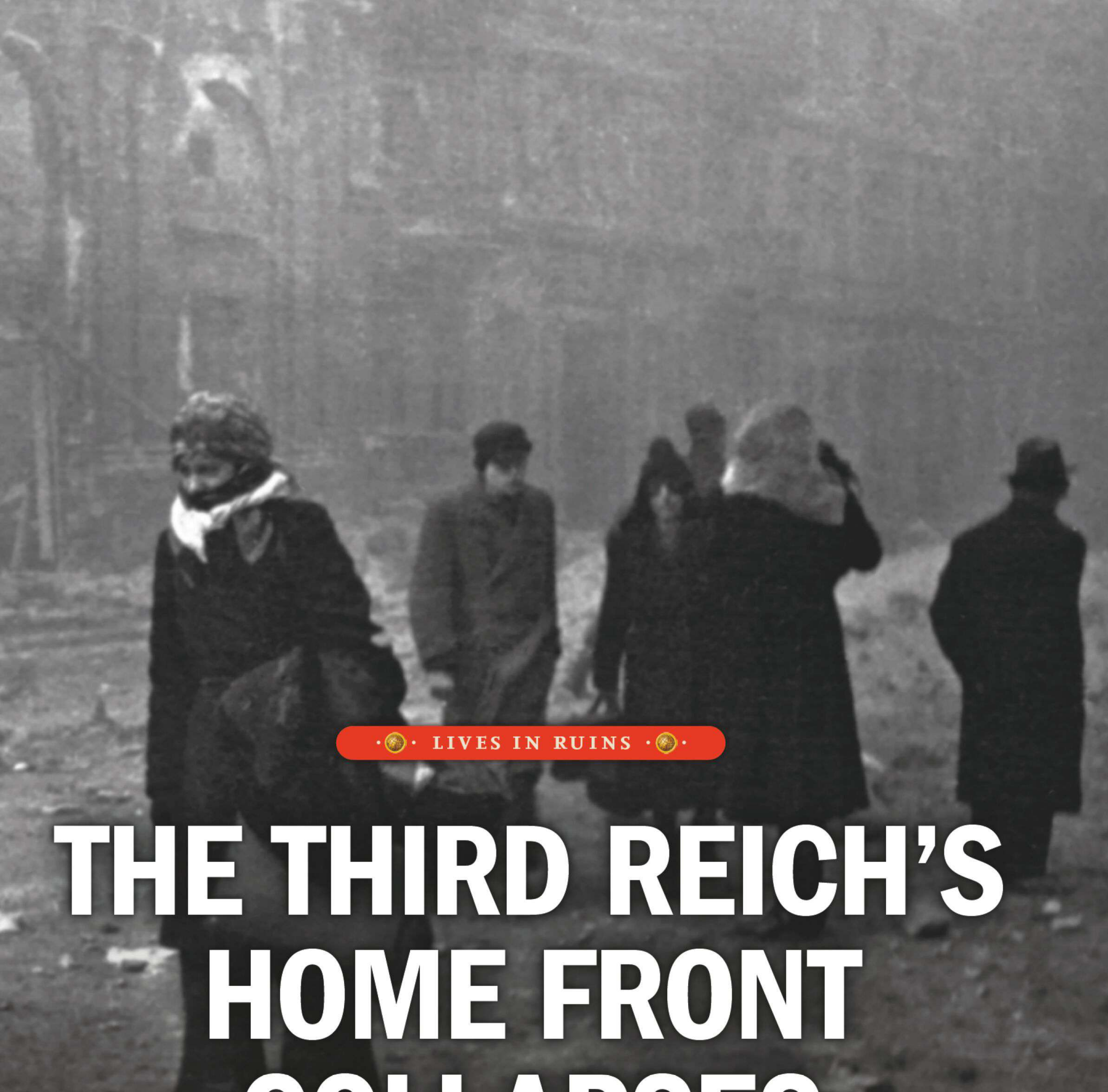
150,715 sick and wounded Russian soldiers

The Red Army was involved in some fierce street fighting during the campaign from the Oder to Berlin.

When the air raid was over, surviving inhabitants searched through the streets, hoping that their homes were still intact.

1944

4TH OCTOBER



LIVES IN RUINS

THE THIRD REICH'S HOME FRONT COLLAPSES

In late 1944, German mothers – amid the rubble of bombed-out streets in big cities – face long queues outside shops with nothing left on the shelves. The Third Reich's women hustle through the urban ruins, while the men are at the front and children evacuated to the countryside.

Germany, 1944

THE STAGE IS SET



As the war progresses, Adolf Hitler's promise of a brighter future dims. As air sirens howl over and over to herald the approach of more Allied bombers to the cities, Germans live with increasing shortages, missing men at the front and grief over dead relatives among the ruins.

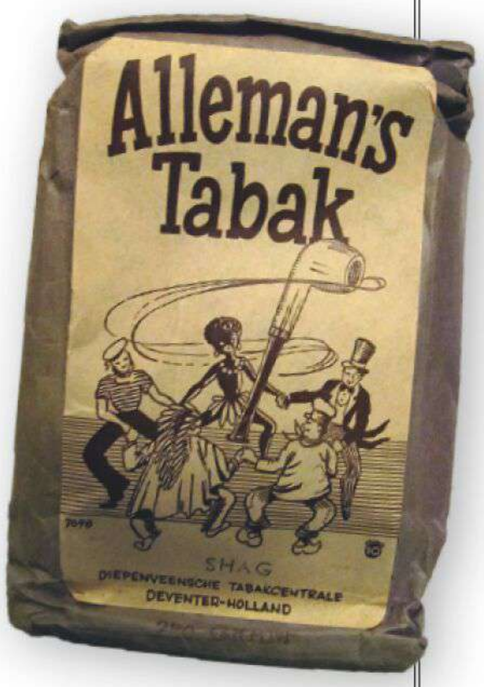
Anneliese Heider's fingers tapped away as she focussed on the typewriter's black keys on Wednesday 4th October, 1944. The 16-year-old clerk made an extra effort, because after five years of war, there was a shortage of paper in Germany. When Anneliese hit the wrong key, she carefully tried to rub out the mistake, leaving the document almost unreadable.

The sun's rays streamed through the windows on the fourth floor of the building where Anneliese and the other clerks in Munich's railway administration sat for five days a week. The fine weather prevented the building getting cold, unlike other days when girls had to sit wearing knitted mittens to keep warm. But the blue sky nevertheless gave rise to murmurs and sighs. The girls knew only too well that clear weather often meant Allied air raids on Munich.

Parts of the southern German city were already in ruins. On the way to work from her parents' house on the outskirts of the city each morning Anneliese observed the rubble in the streets. In many places the façades of buildings had collapsed after being bombed, leaving them looking like giant doll's houses where everyone could look straight into the living rooms and kitchens.

The clerks were right to be concerned about the air strikes. That morning, sirens howled across Munich, and the clerks automatically left, picking up their

German cities lay in ruins at the end of the war, and many of the homeless had to be put up by their fellow countrymen.



After war broke out, luxury goods such as tobacco became harder to obtain.

coats and packed lunches and taking their typewriters with them. The girls had been given precise instructions that the appliances were difficult to replace and must not be lost.

On the stairs Anneliese followed a line of employees heading down five floors into the basement shelter, where the clerk pushed her typewriter under a bench. The entire procedure was now a routine part of everyday war. The population's enthusiasm over the war's early victories had long been replaced by fear, deprivation, loss and hunger.

The war divided families

Many Germans had enthusiastically backed Hitler throughout the 1930s in the hope of better living conditions, but from the moment Nazi Germany's armies crossed the border into Poland in September 1939, a new reality for the German people emerged.

Month after month station platforms across Germany filled with weeping women and children who kissed lovers, husbands and fathers goodbye as trains headed off towards the front. Those relatives left behind had only their worries and fears of never seeing their men again.

Though losses in the war's first two years were relatively low, everyone feared the postman turning up with a black-edged envelope with the message that a husband or son had "fallen for the Führer".

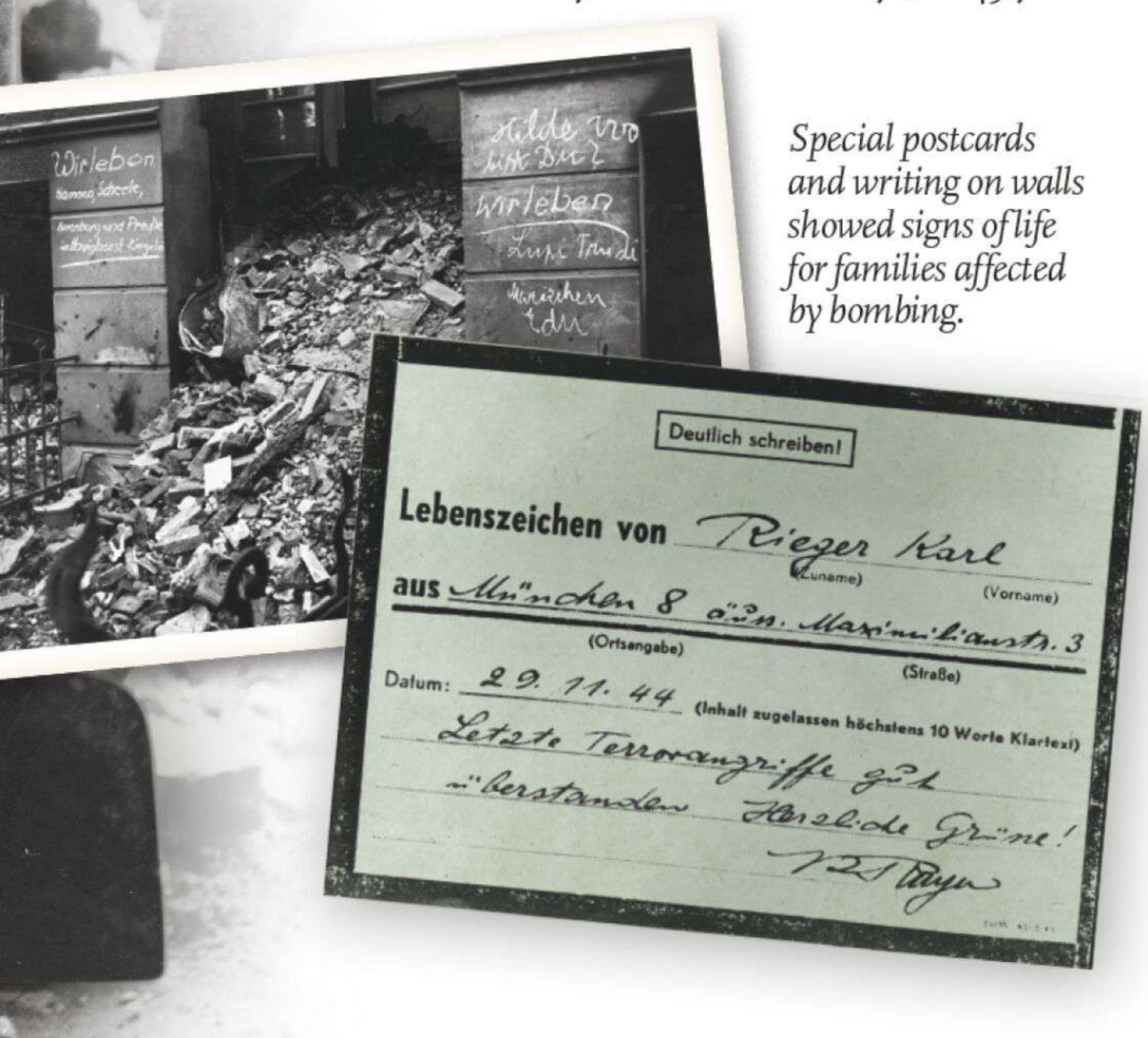
Anneliese Heider feared that one day her family would receive such a letter. The girl's father could not become a soldier because of a lost arm in World War I. But her brother Ludwig was called up to the Reichsarbeitsdienst when he finished school where young men worked in the fields. In the summer of 1941 her father, mother and sister watched as 20-year-old Ludwig was sent away to the 1,800-kilometre-long Eastern Front that had just been opened up by Hitler.

"We all were worried about him. Sometimes, as we sat down to have a meal, mama broke into tears wondering where her son was and if he had anything to eat", recounted Anneliese after the war.

In total Hitler sent 3.7 million troops against the Soviet Union, and almost all Germans had a close family member at the front – a situation that played hard on the psyche.

"Even when I summon all my energy together, your uncertain fate eats away at me constantly", a 43-year-old woman expressed in a letter to her husband, who in 1943 had not been heard from for months. The letters from the front could take several weeks to arrive, especially in the last years of the war. But every time the postman arrived empty handed, women's anxiety grew.

Not only were the men missed every day, a lack of basic provisions put pressure on Germans at home.



Special postcards and writing on walls showed signs of life for families affected by bombing.

Hunger and cold were daily issues

Although the Nazi regime had introduced rationing on 28th August, 1939, the standard of living did not drop dramatically over the war's first two years. Housewives could still find products on the shelves and rationing cards allowed them reasonable amounts of meat, bread and butter. Only luxury goods such as alcohol, coffee and tobacco could not be enjoyed in the same quantities as before.

But the crisis accelerated when bombs fell systematically over Germany, destroying cities, factories and railways in 1942. The shops became emptier, clothes shop mannequins stood naked and queues grew outside of shops. A notification of sugar was no guarantee that the store had any, so housewives queued up early in the morning to increase the chance of getting hold of the scarce goods. In the meantime, women discussed how 200 grams of flour or one decilitre milk could stretch for several days.

"People in the shops talk about nothing apart from food... This everyday palaver is getting increasingly on my nerves... At home, there is the constant worry about what we are going to cook... We lack so many of the ingredients that we need. Housewives are certainly not having it easy at the moment", a woman wrote to her husband at the front.

Experience from World War I had shown the Nazi leaders that food shortages could cause people to turn against the regime. The authorities therefore tried hard to procure sugar from Hungary and grain from Ukraine. But when the soldiers on the beleaguered Eastern Front also needed food, the regime found itself caught in a dilemma and had to think creatively. To improve the food situation at home, Nazis ordered female schoolteachers into the woods to pick everything from herbs, sorrel and chives to nettles and dandelions. Moreover the regime counselled German housewives in how the ingredients could be turned into soup.

Germans were always foraging for anything edible. Anneliese took her mother to the forest where edible mushrooms were a "very special treat", when her mother cleaned and sautéed them with onions and parsley. The Heider family was also fortunate enough to have a garden with herbs, beans and fruit, which sweetened their frugal life.

Toilet paper was also difficult to find, so it was Anneliese's responsibility to provide an alternative:

"It was my job to sit down with a stack of old newspapers and cut a supply of toilet paper. But before using this home-made toilet paper, I had to crumple each piece several times to soften it".

Coal for cooking and heating was almost impossible to come by. Sometimes the cold was so harsh that in the dark of night the family crept out to the railway tracks

Women pulled on uniforms

When the men went to the front, women had to take on public jobs that according to Nazi ideology would otherwise never have been intended for the weaker sex.



Postal workers, who were not yet fully trained, wore a beret instead of the cap.

to collect pieces of coal that had fallen off the wagons. The risk was great – the Nazis regarded the act as theft and punished offenders. Collecting coal was not the only thing Germans did to break the law in an attempt to provide basic necessities: black market trade flourished in the Third Reich.

Black market thrived

Increasingly tight rationing forced Germans to drive to the country for food – even though the act was criminal – in what were known as Hamsterfharten (hamstering trips). Townsfolk often brought watches, tobacco or clothes for payment as things had greater value than a bundle of Reichsmark. Farmers could be seen dressed in fine clothes that were taken in exchange for grain and meat on the black market. The regime tried to prevent the illegal trade with

Gas mask VM 37 was produced specifically to protect civilians.



Young girls from Nazi organization Bund Deutscher Mädel were given lessons in using a gas mask in September 1939. The Nazis feared that the enemy would use chemical weapons during air raids on German cities.

severe penalties, but often had difficulty grabbing the merchants who hid behind random stalls or in small alleys in the city. Nazi officials, however – considering people's hunger – were not surprised that shady dealings were going on.

One Nazi Gauleiter described how people were both hoarding and buying goods furtively from under the counter, at the door, on the black market and even through barter at wildly inflated prices. He observed this grew as fast as the bitterness among those who didn't have the contacts, time or ability to act illegally, or whose conscience forbid them from breaking the law.

For most people however, conscience played no significant role, as their stomachs rumbled, and children went to bed hungry. While the poor had no options to fill their stomachs, more affluent Germans sold their possessions to get an extra chicken or additional pound of butter – even educated people like professor's wife Mathilde Wolff-Mönckeberg.

"Believe it or not, even I have taken to bartering as everybody else does, and it really has its fascination", Wolff-Mönckeberg wrote in a letter to her children and explained that the family's old dining table had been taken in barter.

"I am quite upset about this table, but we cannot afford sentimentality. I have exchanged the table for fat and meat and quite a number of other delicatessen, which the new owner will bring from her canteen. What else can one do these days? The stomach demands its due and money does not buy a thing", she elaborated. The loss of loved one's belongings that were part of barter, was nothing compared to the loss of privacy – as many German families had to make room in their homes for the homeless.

Strangers stayed with the Heiders

When Allied aircraft turned more and more German residential areas into ruins during 1943, the Nazi regime commanded that families who still had their home free up space to house homeless Germans. For Anneliese Heider and her family on the outskirts of Munich, the order meant that in the late summer of 1943 a finely dressed baroness and her daughter suddenly knocked at the door to find shelter. The baroness had genuine jewellery the likes of which Anneliese had never seen before. Decorative jewels were in turn the only thing the guests had left – everything else lay hidden under the rubble of their destroyed homes in Hamburg.

The lodgers moved into Anneliese and Ludwig's room where a stove was lined up with two plates. Before the war, the North Germans had been accustomed to having servants who cleaned, shopped and cooked for them, so the baroness again and again turned to the family to help with household chores.

A young girl also moved into a basement room in the Heider's home, and Anneliese was obliged to sleep in the living room. With three lodgers it meant that everyone had to squeeze into the family's small bunker in the basement, and that they all had to share the water in the weekly bath.

"With so many people coming and going at different times, our once private and comfortable home had become very crowded, more like a boarding house. Our living

room, now my bedroom, became my only refuge, a place where I could withdraw from the turmoil of our crazy quilt existence and live wherever my books and my imagination could take me", said Anneliese later. Many Germans used books as an escape. In a book the reader could escape from fear, hunger and the ruins.

Also, theatres and cinemas were popular even when bombs rained down heavily. In Greater Germany there were over 7,000 cinemas, including 400 in Berlin, and propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels said it was important for people's morale that establishments continued to offer entertainment.

Anneliese Heider often went to the pictures with her work colleague Martina, but only when the sky was cloudy, so the girls wouldn't risk Allied bombs cutting the film short.

Mathilde Wolff-Mönckeberg also trudged "through rain, and storm... even snow" to go to classical concerts and the professor's wife noted that it was not just cultured citizens who took refuge in a world without longing and worries:

"Public lectures on Shakespeare are packed. The biggest university auditorium is stuffed to capacity with all kinds of people, who, in the old days, would never have dreamed of coming". According to the journalist Ursula von Kardorff more affluent people held feasts in the middle of the capital's misery – but the reason was much more tragicomic.

"The thing is to have as many parties as possible and to make the most of one's house while it is still there", wrote von Kardorff.

Children played in the rubble

While parents could only escape their worries briefly, children were good at finding diversion in everyday life. The youngest had never known anything but war, and as they clambered among the rubble they did not think that disease and death lurked around every corner. The ruins were an exciting playground where they could climb the mountain of rubble and play hide and seek collecting shrapnel from grenades.

"All around them was destruction, but the children's sheer joy showed that for them at least for them the world was not at an end", noted one mother from Bremerhaven, when she had to pull her daughter out of a dangerous game one day.

"It was such a scene of childhood happiness that I didn't have the heart to disturb it... 'Wheee!' My Ute screamed in joyful chorus with the other children as, with gleaming eyes, they slid down a heap of rubble just as if it were a children's slide... She looked at me with sheer delight in her eyes".

At other times the ruins offered macabre experiences – as 11-year-old Ulli Fromann discovered.

"Yesterday we found a soldier's boot in a pile of rubble. There was still a bit of bone in it", described the girl in a letter to her father, who fought on the Eastern Front.

At the beginning of the war, the children went to school as usual, but from 1943 students had more and more days off because of the bombing. As a rule, pupils would have two lessons later if bombs fell in the morning, while the bell would ring early if shelling occurred in the middle of the day, but that rarely happened.

"We are always pleased when school is cancelled because there is no heat there. And we don't do any homework because we don't have any books", wrote Ulli's younger sister Jutta in a letter to her father in 1945 – the sisters had not seen him in six years.

Childhood was also harsh. Often children would sit and cry with their mothers, mostly missing their fathers and perhaps older brothers at the front. As the head of the family was absent, children rolled up their sleeves and took responsibility at a young age.

"I do a lot because mother is so timid", wrote a 10-year-old boy in his diary, while Ulli wrote to her father that, "I try to be a stand-in father for Mummy, because I'm practical like you and Mummy's not good at that sort of thing".

Often the children had to look after younger siblings, keep their position in the queue at the shops and help to keep the home clean amid the dusty ruins. But the chores were often on an empty stomach, and mothers were in despair at not being able to do more for their sons and daughters.

"After we have eaten, they [the children] always ask what else is there to eat", wrote a

Housewives had new roles

The ideal of a woman as housewife came under pressure as the need for women grew in the labour market.

According to the Nazi ideology the role of women was to bear children and care for the home while men worked. Gradually though, Hitler relaxed the ideal, as German industry and agriculture needed labour. In the late 1930s he introduced a so-called Pflichtjahr, where young women had to take on compulsory labour in households and on farms across the Reich for a year.

Slightly older housewives also had to work outside the home – in 1943 approximately 1.2 million German women worked in the armaments industry.



Weapons' factories especially needed female labour during the war.

FACTS

WEEKLY RATIONS FELL

Living rations for a typical consumer* 1939-1945:

Time	Bread	Meat	Fat
■ September 1939	2,400 g	500 g	270 g
■ April 1942	2,000 g	300 g	206 g
■ June 1943	2,325 g	250 g	218 g
■ October 1944	2,225 g	250 g	218 g
■ March 1945	1,778 g	222 g	109 g

** For example, salaried employees and housewives*

Even bread and other baked goods were in short supply, creating queues in front of stores.

woman from Berlin. Another mother from the capital reported that her children refused to eat rotten potatoes and the boys "began to cry because there was nothing else to eat".

For a woman who in August 1944 had not heard a word from her husband on the Eastern Front, the constant struggle for her family's survival was becoming too much. In her diary she complained to her husband:

"Why aren't I just lying beneath the rubble? There are so many difficulties to negotiate, and it is really not in my nature to be a battler. I'm in despair... I do not know if you are ever coming back, or if you've been dead for a long time. And I would so like to relax again. I'm at the end of my tether".

The woman nevertheless found the strength to keep things going at home. Other mothers had to make a worse decision.

Children were sent to the country

Hunger was greatest in the bombed-out cities, and especially in the war's last two years when living conditions became so miserable that many parents decided to send the children away. In September 1940, a memo stated, "On the orders of the Führer, children from areas of repeated night air raids have... been sent to other areas of the Reich". But at first, parents found it very difficult to sign the document that would send their children to Kinderlandverschickung – away from the bomb-threatened cities and into the countryside.

What seemed like a considerate action by the regime was in fact primarily intended as an effective way to educate youth in the spirit of National Socialism. Children between 10 and 14 were sent to a combination of boarding school and Hitler Youth camps, where, according to one German boy, "We participated in rituals... calculated to serve the same goals, and intended to wean us from all unboyish, "weak" activities".

Children under 10 years were usually accommodated with a host family where not everyone was treated well.

Many hosts only took the children on to earn three Reichsmarks per day – a fee paid by the State. At the same time the child was often used as free labour on the farm.

As the situation became even more miserable in the big cities during 1943, many mothers had no alternative but to send the children into the countryside where their sons and daughters could at least get more food and not risk being blown to pieces by bombs. But parting was not easy.

"I was loaded onto a bus. Then my »



When the bombs dropped on Germany, cafés were set up in basements.



At train stations thousands of German children waited to be evacuated from the cities.

mother went crazy. She cried like mad and said, 'I cannot leave my daughter alone. Can't you see...'" said a girl who was sent away in 1944. For older boys too, the situation wasn't easy, although they tried to be "hard as Krupp-manufactured steel". Teenager Herbert Weber recounted:

"Our mothers' tears apparently had no impact upon us. But I remember holding back the feelings that overcame me as my mother took me into her arms. I could have wailed. But who wanted to be that sissy in front of all one's peers?"

Even the security services noted that family separation had a bad effect on morale.

"The longing for parents and children for each other is wearing us all out. Visiting is rarely possible or allowed..." said a SD report, which assessed that the distance and the lack of contact between child and parents eventually damaged the family bond as they became strangers to each other.

Critically, however, both the regime and children's parents knew that the risk to their children needed to be reduced so they didn't die from starvation or bombing. At the start of the summer of 1943, approximately 1.7 million children aged six to 14 years were evacuated from bomb-threatened cities.

The end of German hardship was not too far away. As Allied ground troops advanced closer to Germany, the time for reunion was getting closer for mothers, their children and their husbands.

Heider family hoisted the white flag

In the spring of 1945 the Germans were running out of energy, and just wanted the war to end as soon as possible. No one was in any doubt that Germany was defeated. The question was whether it would be Russian or American tanks that arrived first. On 29th April, 1945 the Heider family heard artillery fire approaching from the west, and Anneliese was happy that the Americans would reach Munich before the Red Army – on the one hand rumours spread of Russian violence and mass rape while on the other it was US troops distributing chocolate.

But no one knew what the situation would be in the southern German city, and the Heider family began preparations. All day the household took beds, food, water, blankets and clothes down to the basement, so they could survive if the fighting dragged on. Anneliese also noted that her father had prepared a white sheet to signal surrender.

"I hope he knows when the time is right. If he hangs the flag up too soon and there are any SS around, they will hang him from the nearest tree. If he doesn't hang it out soon enough Americans troops will most certainly shell anything they

feel is hostile", thought Anneliese. At night she slept poorly as her mind raced thinking about the dramatic fates of her friend Martina and her brother Ludwig. Two months earlier, Martina had died of a simple infection because of drug shortages in the city, and Ludwig had been taken prisoner by the Russians.

"Dear God, please be with my brother and bring him back to us safely. Mama desperately needs her son back. I don't think she can survive without him", Anneliese prayed.

One night residents heard that German soldiers had withdrawn, and in the morning the Heider family saw the first US tank rumble through the street outside the house. Anneliese's father raced up to the roof and hung a white flag out of a small window. Later the same day it was reported that the city's forces had surrendered, and the Americans had established a headquarters in Anneliese's old school.

But even though the war was over for the Heider family, they had to wait three and a half years before Ludwig returned home from the Soviet Union. Anneliese heaved a sigh of relief on 30th April – six years of worries and frustration was over.

"I was 11 years old when this nightmare started, now I'm 17. Years lost to the war – my youth lost to war. But somehow we survived".

PERSPECTIVE

Soldiers came home crushed

The end of the war did not mean that the German soldiers' suffering was over. Thousands only returned home after many years in Allied captivity. And when the soldiers finally returned to their families, many found that they were unable to work as they used to, because of war injuries.

War invalids became part of the urban landscape of post-war Germany.

Soldiers with reduced ability to work



The bars indicate the number of returning soldiers with minimum 50 percent reduced work capacity. The data was compiled in West Germany in September 1950.

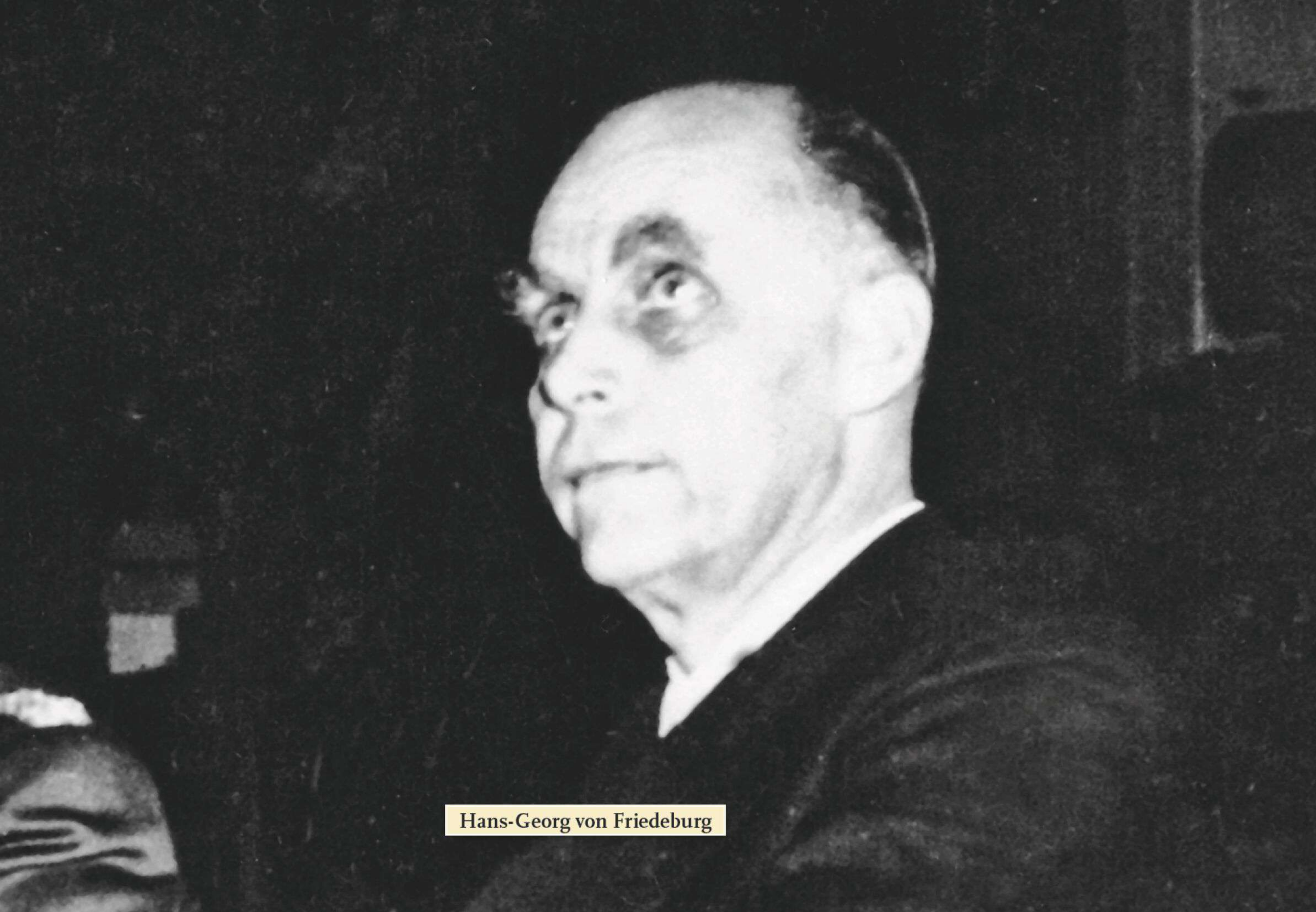
The German military commanders felt great shame at surrendering, and von Friedeburg committed suicide a few days later.

Wilhelm Oxenius

Alfred Jodl

1945

30TH APRIL



Hans-Georg von Friedeburg

THE THIRD REICH'S FINAL DAYS

GERMANY IS FORCED TO PEACE

Surrender is the only option for Germany. But the road to peace needs to be drawn out as long as possible to give German soldiers and refugees the chance to get away from the dreaded Soviet soldiers on the Eastern Front. Germany's new president has a plan, but it won't be easy to implement.

Germany, 1945

THE STAGE IS SET



Adolf Hitler is dead, and Berlin reduced to rubble. All fronts are disintegrating, and the German troops flee in panic. But Hitler has specified that the fight must continue. The Führer's decision makes the path to peace an almost impossible task for his successors. But faithful naval commander Karl Dönitz must try to follow it.

HITLER'S FINAL WISHES WERE CLEAR: "I demand of all Germans, all National Socialists, men, women, and all the men of the Armed Forces, that they be faithful and obedient unto death to the new government and its President".

The words came from the Führer's Political Testament, left behind after he'd committed suicide in Berlin. But as yet, no one outside the Führerbunker knew of Hitler's last will.

MONDAY, 30TH APRIL, 1945

US troops entered Munich. The Red Army stood in front of the Reichstag in Berlin city centre.

German fleet operations commander Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz was at his headquarters in Plön near Kiel when he received an unexpected telegram from Berlin: "The Führer has appointed you, Herr Admiral, as his successor in place of Reichsmarschall Göring. Confirmation in writing follows. You are hereby authorised to take any measures which the situation demands – Bormann".

Martin Bormann was Hitler's closest associate in the Führerbunker. Albert Speer was also present in Plön, having been sacked as Minister of Armaments a few days earlier. Speer offered his congratulations, but there was no party atmosphere – only the depressing realisation that Hitler was preparing to die. That Hitler had already committed suicide several hours earlier wasn't yet known. Neither did the new President of the Reich know the exact wording of Hitler's final testament; he mistakenly believed that Hitler wanted an apolitical military officer to end the lost war.

Later that evening, Heinrich Himmler appeared in Plön. The leader of the SS had escaped from Berlin, and now demanded a meeting with Dönitz. He arrived with six armed men. Dönitz was nervous. It was true that Himmler had been stripped of all his official duties, but Himmler still retained control of both the SS and German police. Dönitz hid a gun on his desk.

"Please read this", Dönitz said handing the telegram to Himmler. Himmler read the contents slowly and turned pale. He seemed broken when he bowed to Dönitz.

Himmler asked if he could become "the second man" in Dönitz's



The Reichstag, symbol of German power, was destroyed by Russian bombs and tanks.

government, but the new president refused. He could hardly remove Himmler completely; he still needed the SS to maintain discipline.

Late that night, Dönitz ordered two Wehrmacht commanders, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel and Colonel General Alfred Jodl, to report to him. They'd served as Hitler's closest advisers, and now apprised Dönitz on the military situation.

A quick review revealed that the war could not continue much longer. Allied bombing had crippled war production, and the country had virtually no ammunition reserves. Supply roads were virtually destroyed. On several fronts, the army had dissipated. The fleet had suffered heavy losses, and the Luftwaffe was lacking fuel.

"The war must be brought to an end as quickly as possible, in order to prevent further bloodshed", Dönitz concluded.



Hermann Göring was allowed to meet the press after his arrest in Austria. To the right is his marshal's baton.

Tuesday, 1st May, 1945

The Red Army captured the Reichstag. German defence lines in Italy were broken. The British advanced into Holstein.

At 10.53, Dönitz received another telegram from Bormann in Berlin: "Will now in force. Coming to you as quickly as possible. Pending my arrival you should in my opinion refrain from public statement". Bormann never arrived in Plön, but he later sent another telegram admitting that Hitler "died" the day before at 15.30 – no mention of suicide. In addition, the telegram contained a list of Hitler's chosen ministers.

Dönitz found it remarkable that Hitler's death had been kept secret for a day, and assumed it was to give his rivals time to prepare a coup. It meant he had to act quickly if he wanted to hold on to the power Hitler had bequeathed him. His guards were told to arrest Göbbels and Bormann, should either show up in Plön.

The German people were informed of Hitler's death via radio: "It is reported from the Führer's headquarters that our Führer Adolf Hitler, fighting to the last breath against Bolshevism, fell for Germany this afternoon in his headquarters in the Reich Chancellery. On 30th April the Führer appointed Grand Admiral Dönitz his successor".

Dönitz chose to defy Hitler's ministerial list, which contained several familiar faces from previous years. These Nazi relics were inappropriate for Dönitz's needs – the Admiral aimed to surrender on the Western Front while continuing the war on the Eastern Front. That way, he could keep escape routes open for large numbers of soldiers and civilians in the east to reach the safety of British and American troops in the west.

On the Eastern Front the war was being waged with unprecedented brutality. The Germans were being repaid in kind for the atrocities they'd committed against the Russians at the beginning of the war. Germans troops were being massacred, and German women raped in frightening numbers. The Nazis had long been using reports of these reprisals as propaganda to harden resolve, but they had also scared millions of civilians into going on the run. Dönitz wanted to save them.

In the evening, he held his first radio address. The Grand Admiral did not yet know that Hitler was dead by his own hand, so took the opportunity to pay tribute to the deceased while pointing out Hitler had appointed him his successor.

"In full consciousness of my responsibilities I therefore assume the leadership of the German people... My first task is to save German men and women from destruction by the advancing Bolshevist enemy. It is to serve this purpose alone that the military struggle continues. For all this I need your help. Give me your confidence because your road is mine as well", Dönitz asked.

When issuing his Order of the Day to the Wehrmacht, Dönitz was more direct. "I expect discipline and obedience. Chaos and ruin can be prevented only by the swift and unreserved execution of my orders", he emphasised, following up with a thinly veiled threat: "Anyone who at this juncture fails in his duty and condemns German women and children to slavery and death is a traitor and a coward".

Right up until 11th May, deserters were executed to strengthen morale.

3 languages

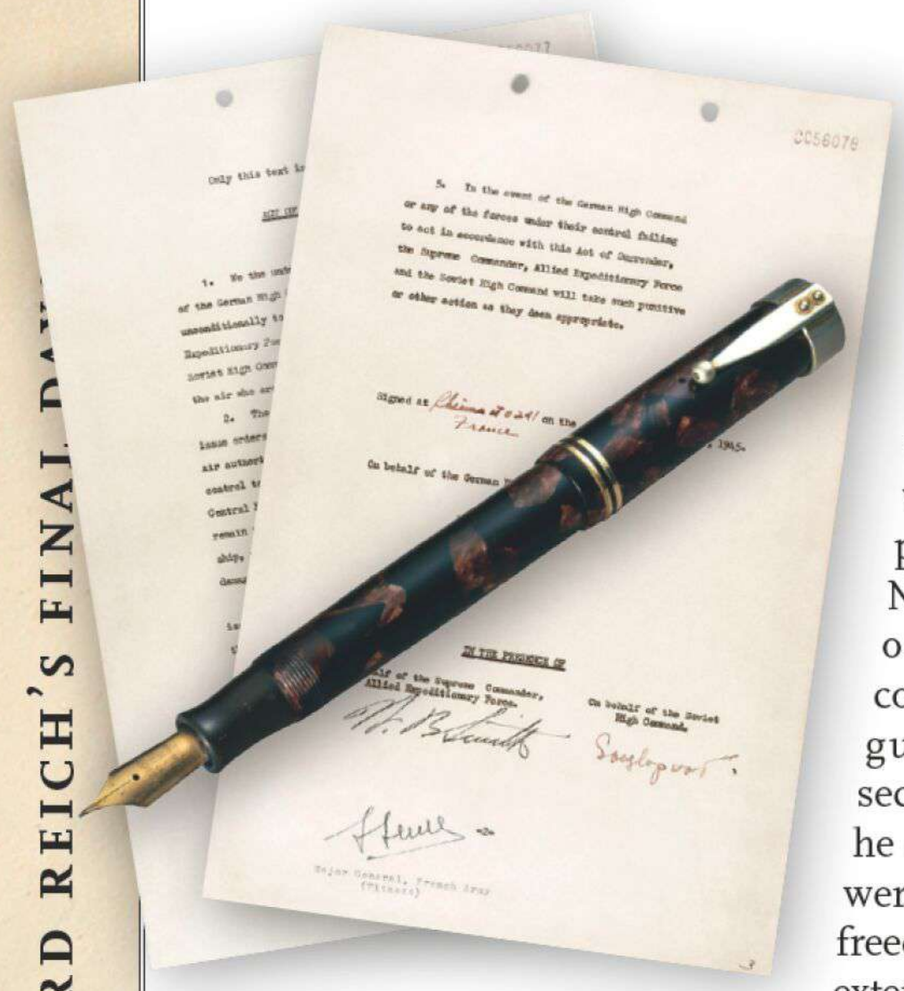
The German Instrument of Surrender was written in English, Russian and German, but only the English and Russian versions were considered official.

Wednesday, 2nd May, 1945

The Germans capitulated in Italy. US troops captured Bavaria. The capital, Berlin, gave up the fight against the Red Army. The British occupied Lubeck in northern Germany.

His headquarters in Plön were now close to being overrun, so Dönitz decided to move to the Mürwik naval academy in Flensburg near the Danish border. Preparations began.

Dönitz had assembled a new German government, which included Speer as one of its ministers. Speer had been thinking about what would happen to Germany after the war. He proposed making a radio speech urging those in the lost parts of Germany to take heart and begin reconstruction. After a ministerial meeting, Himmler



The German Instrument of Surrender filled two pages and was signed with fountain pens.

waited for Speer. He wanted to share his plans for Denmark and Norway. The two occupied countries could be used as a guarantee for the security of senior Nazis, he said. If the Germans weren't guaranteed their freedom, the war would be extended to Scandinavia.

Himmler also attempted to intervene in a meeting of the senior military commanders. He believed the German government and High Command should be moved to Prague, as Flensburg could be occupied at any time. The idea was met with applause, but Dönitz remained adamant:

"If the British want to capture us here, let them do it!" He believed the German leadership would lose its legitimacy if it waged war from abroad.

Himmler was now nervous, and demanded an aircraft so he could escape to Prague. Half in jest, Speer considered letting Himmler fly away with pilot Werner Baumbach, to be deposited on an Allied airfield. But before the plan went into action, Himmler demurred: "When people fly in your planes, they don't know where they're going to land", he snarled.

Himmler's intelligence network was still working, thought Speer, but Baumbach was still keen to leave. He'd previously suggested to Speer that they commandeer a seaplane and fly to a deserted fjord in Greenland. The plane would be packed with all the supplies needed to survive a few months until the Allies forgot them. "No thanks", said Speer.

That evening, Dönitz travelled with Lutz Graf Schwerin von Krosigk, now Chancellor and Minister for Foreign Affairs, from Plön to the new base in Flensburg. They travelled in an armoured Mercedes that Hitler had given Dönitz. The car was attacked several times by Allied fighter planes, forcing the passengers to take cover in ditches. Along the way, Dönitz and von Krosigk stopped at the Kaiser-Wilhelm canal to meet with General Admiral Hans-Georg von Friedeburg. The three men discussed the military situation and agreed to offer Field Marshal Montgomery their military surrender for the whole of northern Germany, but the offer must under no circumstances slow down the flow of refugees from the east.

Von Friedeburg then travelled to Hamburg where he could cross the front line and reach Montgomery in Lüneburg.

Thursday, 3rd May, 1945

British troops entered Hamburg.

Dönitz finally arrived in Flensburg at 03.00, and went exhausted to his bed. After a few hours sleep, he woke to review the situation in the occupied countries, as he awaited news from von Friedeburg with Montgomery.

Commanders and civilian leaders arrived from Denmark and Norway. The message from both countries was that the people remained calm while the German troops were ready for battle. General Lindemann, commander in Denmark, even proposed to lead "one last decent battle" in the country.

Lindemann was vehemently opposed by Werner Best, who was Reich Plenipotentiary in Denmark. He feared a bloodbath and possible Swedish intervention.

Reich Commissar Seyss-Inquart came from occupied Holland, bypassing the British forces in Lower Saxony by sailing across the North Sea. Reich Commissioner Karl Hermann Frank of Bohemia and Moravia in Czechoslovakia also arrived, revealing the country to be on the brink of an uprising and impossible to hold for the Nazis.

Himmler was nevertheless in good spirits. He predicted that cooperation between the Western powers and the Soviet Union would break down within three months. When that happened, it would be necessary for him and the SS to ensure order, but for now it was best to keep a low profile. That evening, Himmler ordered his SS men to disguise themselves in ordinary Wehrmacht uniforms, take fake papers and go underground.

In Lüneburg, von Friedeburg offered to surrender the German forces in the northwest to the British. Montgomery made a point of saying they could not accept soldiers from the Eastern Front; they would have to surrender to Soviet forces.

The British promised to listen if the surrender applied to all German troops in Holland and Denmark as well as northern Germany. This was outside von Friedeburg's negotiating mandate – he would have to drive back to Flensburg.

19 camps
were built by American forces at the end of the war to house German prisoners of war. Up to two million Germans were eventually incarcerated in them.

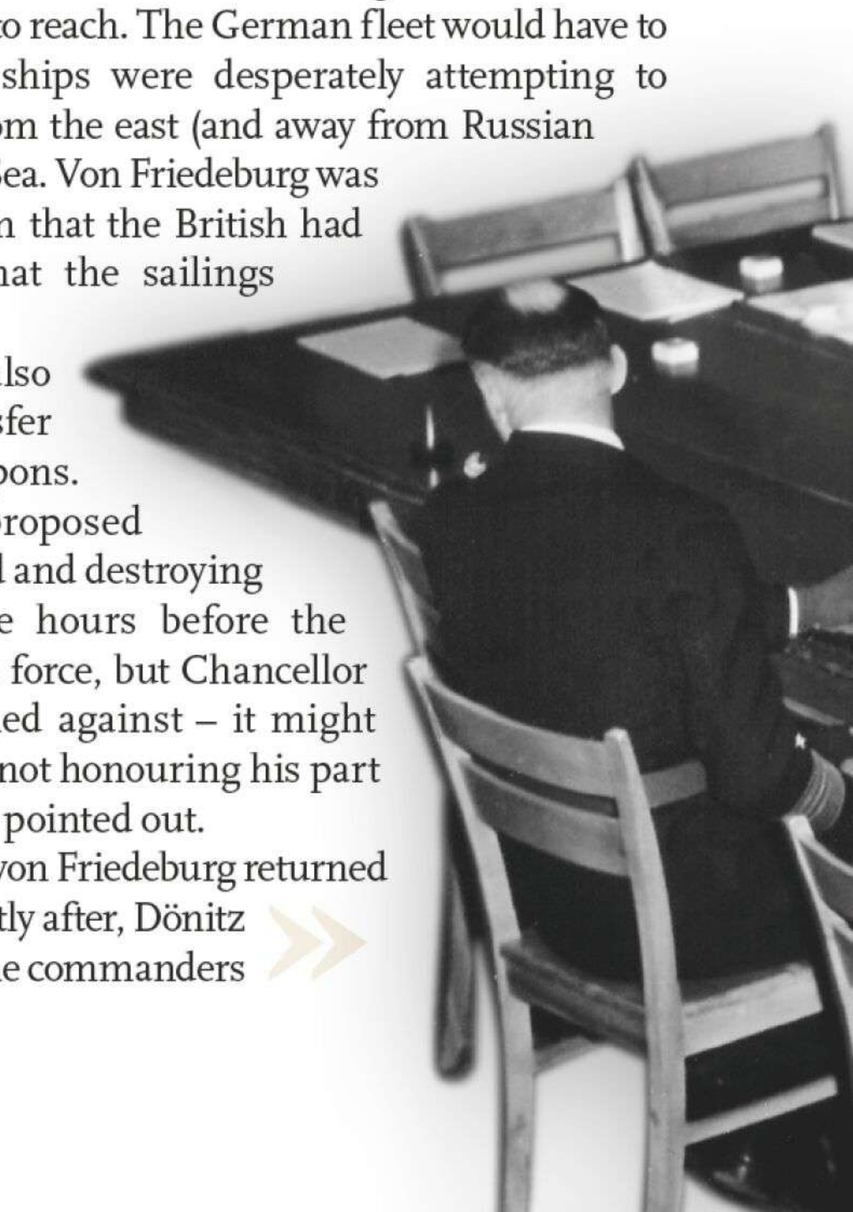
Friday, 4th May, 1945

What was left of the German 9th Army crossed the Elbe and surrendered to US forces.

The German military leadership assembled at 09.00 to discuss Montgomery's conditions. His wide-reaching demands meant agreement was hard to reach. The German fleet would have to surrender, but the ships were desperately attempting to evacuate refugees from the east (and away from Russian troops) via the Baltic Sea. Von Friedeburg was able to reassure them that the British had verbally accepted that the sailings could continue.

Montgomery had also demanded the transfer of all German weapons. Keitel and Jodl proposed ignoring the demand and destroying the weapons in the hours before the surrender came into force, but Chancellor von Krosigk cautioned against – it might lead to Montgomery not honouring his part of the agreement, he pointed out.

After the meeting, von Friedeburg returned to Montgomery. Shortly after, Dönitz ordered his submarine commanders »



Surrender was a drama in three acts

In the spring of 1945, Germany was reduced to a narrow strip sandwiched between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union. Reich President Karl Dönitz had no choice but to capitulate, but the Instrument of Surrender had to be signed three times.

NORTH SEA

FLENSBURG

1

PLÖN

HAMBURG

LÜNEBURG

2

4 BERLIN

POLAND

NAZI GERMANY

PRAGUE

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

3

REIMS

FRANCE

1 Dönitz governs Reich from north Germany

Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz is commanding the Navy from the small town of Plön, when Hitler appoints him the new Reich president. On 2nd May, Dönitz is forced to move headquarters to Flensburg as British forces approach.

2 Parts of the army surrenders

After negotiations, the new German leadership signs a partial surrender at Montgomery's headquarters in Lüneburg on 4th May. The German forces in Holland, northwest Germany and Denmark surrender.

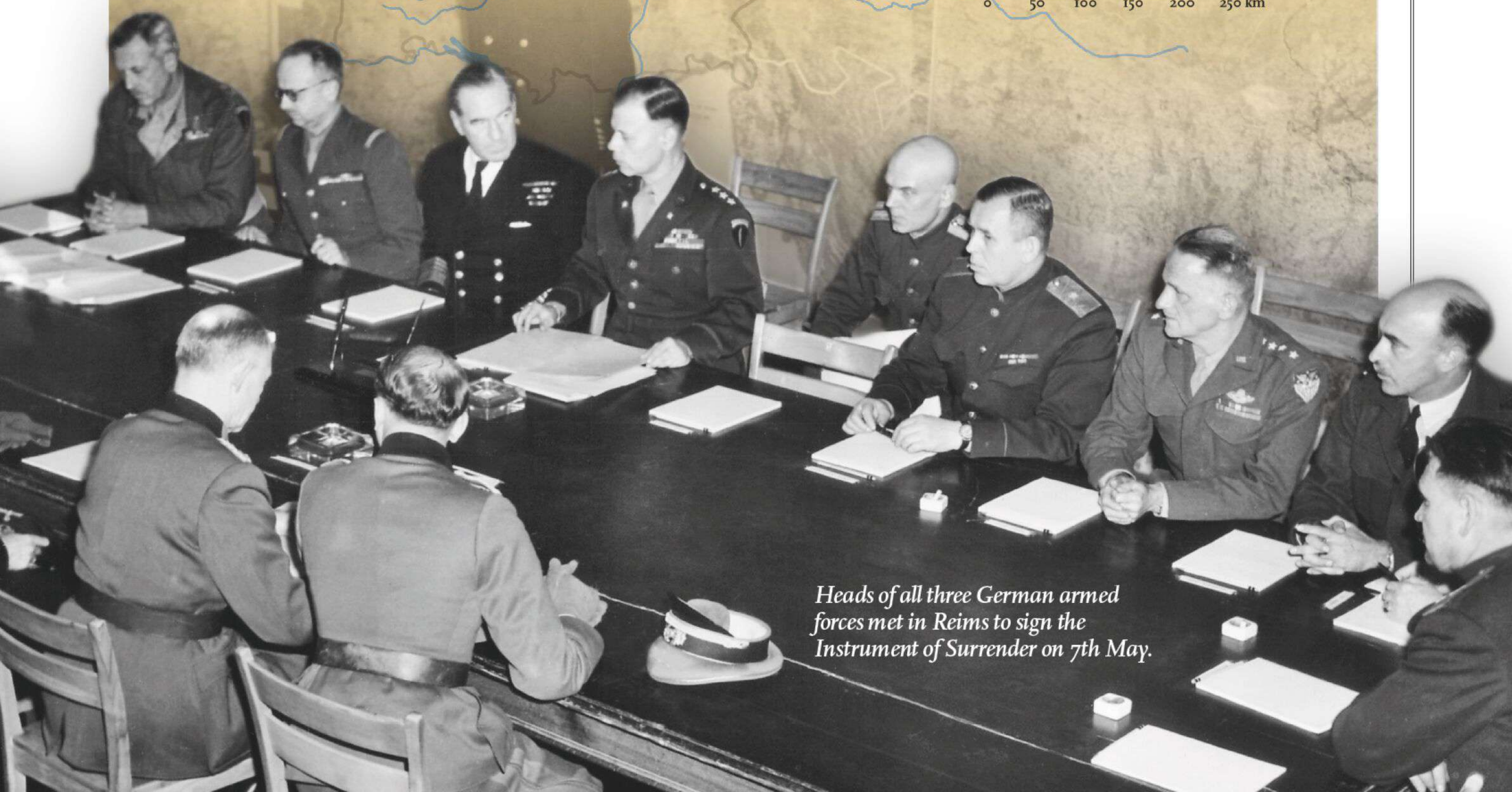
3 Germans give up unconditionally

On 7th May, German negotiators are forced to sign an unconditional surrender with Eisenhower in Reims. But the fighting continues in the east.

4 The war is over

The signing ceremony is repeated in Berlin at the request of Josef Stalin on 8th May. With the formal surrender, the last part of the Wehrmacht surrenders its weapons to the Allies, except for a few isolated units.

0 50 100 150 200 250 km



Heads of all three German armed forces met in Reims to sign the Instrument of Surrender on 7th May.

to stop fighting, and to refrain from destroying their vessels. At Lüneburg, the British press had been summoned to witness von Friedeburg's partial surrender to Montgomery.

At 19.40, Dönitz received the message that the surrender had been signed and would enter into force at 08.00 the following morning. The message spread quickly to the German forces who mostly accepted it, although submarine crews were unhappy that their vessels were to be delivered up to the enemy.

Later that evening, two captains tried to gain access to Dönitz's quarters, demanding to hear the unacceptable order from his own mouth. But the Grand Admiral had already retired, and his aide Walter Ludde-Neurath refused them an interview, although he did cryptically add, "I knew what I would do as a commander".

Both captains nodded and left. During the night, a number of submarines were scuttled.

Not far from Flensburg, Captain Lieutenant Asmus Jepsen mistakenly believed the war was over. He sent his men home and headed to his own village in north Germany.

Saturday, 5th May, 1945

At midnight, German forces surrendered in Holland, Denmark and northwest Germany. Shortly after, Colonel General Alexander Löhr notified Dönitz by telegram that Germany should abandon the defence of Austria.

Asmus Jepsen was arrested and charged with desertion. After a short trial he received his sentence: death.

That night, 11 young German soldiers were also executed in Sønderborg. The sailors had committed mutiny aboard the minesweeper *M612* by locking their officers inside to sail to Flensburg. But they were discovered by German torpedo boats and captured.

Resistance
continued after the surrender. Some German units, including several in Czechoslovakia, fought on for fear of their fate as Soviet prisoners of war.

Dönitz was harsh over breaches of discipline, and neither did he have sympathy for guerrilla warfare. The Grand Admiral prohibited the underground movement Werwolf (werewolf), which the Nazis had set up during the final months of the war. Its purpose had been to lead resistance and commit acts of terrorism behind Allied lines in areas of Germany that had been captured.

Von Friedeburg now left the British headquarters at Lüneburg to travel to the US command centre in Reims, France. Here he was to negotiate a military surrender on the western and southern fronts with Brigadier General Dwight D Eisenhower. But Eisenhower refused to meet with von Friedeburg. Instead, he sent a subordinate to show – by means of a map – the futility of their situation. The US demand was an unconditional German surrender on all fronts.

Again, this exceeded von Friedeburg's negotiating mandate. He would need to contact Dönitz in Flensburg.

Sunday, 6th May, 1945

Von Friedeburg's telegram reached Flensburg in the morning. The US demands triggered a fierce argument in the German headquarters because a complete capitulation would prove fatal for both German troops and refugees on the Eastern Front. Jodl was the fiercest critic, and Dönitz decided to send him to Reims to explain the German dilemma to Eisenhower.

Dönitz then received a telegram from Hermann Göring, who was in Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian Alps with his family. Göring was offering to negotiate "Marshal to Marshal" with Eisenhower to secure "an honourable peace". Dönitz ignored the proposal, but Göring decided to make contact regardless.

Shortly before 17.00, Dönitz informed Himmler that he didn't want to see him any more, but the SS leader believed his time would come in the future.

In the evening, Jodl arrived in Reims by plane. His job was to buy time and only sign the surrender on 8th May. At the same time, he was to secure a 48-hour deadline for German troops to reach safety in the west. But Eisenhower saw through the ploy. Neither his own personal animosity towards Germans after seeing the concentration camps nor the Soviet alliance would allow him to grant concessions. If they did not sign before midnight, negotiations would be broken off and the war resumed with full force. Jodl telegraphed Dönitz: "I see no alternative – chaos or signature. I ask you to confirm to me immediately by radio that I have full powers to sign capitulation".

In Flensburg, Jepsen was taken to the naval base's shooting range. At 20.15 he was executed.

Russians wanted declaration signed again

Stalin was not pleased that the Germans had surrendered to the Western Allies at Reims, and demanded the ceremony be repeated in Berlin.

Although the Russian general Susloparov had been present and signed for the Soviet Union, Stalin refused to recognise the surrender in Reims on 7th May. The Soviet leader wanted a formal ceremony that would take place on German soil in Berlin.

On the morning of 8th May, German commanders flew to the German capital, where they were forced to wait. The Western Allies arrived in the evening and the actual signing of the agreement took place shortly before midnight. Because this occurred after midnight, Moscow time, 9th May became the official Victory Day in the Soviet Union.



The Russian delegation included the city's future – and ill-fated – commander Nikolai Berzarin.



Allied soldiers remained on alert despite the white flag for the first days after surrender.

Although the war might end in a few hours, discipline had to be maintained.

The German leadership discussed the US ultimatum up until midnight. Dönitz viewed it as "sheer extortion", but at 00.40 he admitted defeat. Jodl was authorised to sign.

Monday, 7th May, 1945

Spain broke off diplomatic relations with Germany.

The map room at the US headquarters in Reims was filled with film cameras. War correspondents were preparing to witness the end of the war in Europe. At 02.41, Jodl and von Friedeburg signed with stony faces. Against expectation, the mood wasn't jubilant, rather "a moment of solemn gratitude".

At 12.45, Chancellor von Krosigk gave a radio speech to the German people. His sole task was to inform them about the impending surrender: "After a heroic fight of almost six years of incomparable hardness, Germany has succumbed to the overwhelming power of her enemies. To continue the war would only mean senseless bloodshed", he said.

His speech also defined "unity, law and justice" as the fundamental values of a future Germany. Meanwhile, Dönitz's government decided that the Wehrmacht should restore the traditional military salute in place of the Hitler salute. At the same time, Göring left the Bavarian Alps with the intention of seeking out Eisenhower. He did not get far before being taken prisoner by US soldiers on a mountain road.

Tuesday, 8th May, 1945

Shortly after noon, Dönitz made his last speech from the radio studio in Flensburg's post office:

"We must face facts squarely. The unity of state and party does not exist any more. The party has left the scene of its activities".

Dönitz promised to remain as Reich President and help in the future – if the people wanted it. "Duty keeps me in my difficult post for the sake of Germany".

As Dönitz spoke, Himmler attempted to flee. On a farm near Flensburg, he ditched his black SS uniform in favour of army clothing. His identity was now Heinrich Hitzinger, a sergeant in the German Wehrmacht.

Elsewhere, Stalin wasn't satisfied with the surrender at Reims. He demanded an official declaration be

FACTS

WHITE FLAG WAS HUNG OUT

- In May 1945, German civilians hung white flags from apartments and shops to signal surrender.
- Very few Germans resisted the surrender. Hitler viewed any consideration of defeat as treason, so no plans for guerrilla warfare after a possible defeat existed.
- Suicide was common among both civilians and military personnel in the days leading up to surrender as well as after it. For example, 53 of the German army's 554 generals took their own lives.



Nazi Command tried to delay the peace talks, to give refugees from the east time to get away from Soviet troops who were taking violent reprisals for earlier German atrocities. This group – with all their belongings collected on carts – arrived in Berlin during May 1945.

signed in Berlin. Three German commanders, with Wilhelm Keitel in the lead, were soon flying to the German capital.

Wednesday, 9th May, 1945

The unconditional surrender took force at midnight. In Norway alone, 350,000 soldiers gave themselves up.

In the studio in Flensburg Post Office, the news reader was ready to deliver the last official report from the German front.

"From midnight on all fronts a cease fire has been in force. By command of Admiral Dönitz the Armed Forces have given up the hopeless struggle. A heroic fight that has lasted for nearly six years thus comes to an end. It has brought us resounding victories, but also heavy defeats. Ultimately the German Armed Forces have succumbed to overwhelming superior strength".

The war was over, but Dönitz's government continued. Every day at 10.00, the cabinet would meet in Flensburg to discuss the situation regarding supplies as well as its own future. The mood fluctuated between despair and the belief that the Allies needed Dönitz to rebuild the devastated country. He shared Himmler's belief that the Western powers would soon run into trouble with the Soviet Union, and Dönitz would offer himself up as an ally.



Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz was photographed like a common criminal after his arrest by the Allies.

Thursday, 10th May, 1945

The final set of German troops surrendered in the Channel Islands. The same applied to forces in the French ports of Lorient, Saint-Nazaire, La Rochelle and Dunkirk.

In Flensburg, a German court martial was convened to hear the case against sailor Johann Süss, who by refusing to make his vessel ready to sail was deemed a threat to the Navy's morale. His senseless execution was carried out the following morning.

Friday, 11th May, 1945

Bornholm off Denmark was occupied by the Red Army.

Flensburg Harbour and Fjord were filled with a fleet of around 450 warships, passenger ships, barges and cargo vessels. These were carrying refugees, soldiers from the Eastern Front and concentration camp prisoners evacuated by the SS. 25,000 people were left stranded in the city. Historians have since

estimated around 2-4 million Germans escaped the Soviet-occupied areas to come under Western Allied control, thanks to Dönitz's negotiating tactics in the final days of the war.

Saturday, 12th May, 1945

Himmler – now posing as Heinrich Hitzinger – fled south with a handful of disguised SS officers. After reaching the Elbe, the group were forced to leave their car and cross the river in a fishing boat before hiding on a farm for several days.

Sunday, 13th May, 1945

The British finally occupied Flensburg, banning all Nazi organisations. At 10.45, an English officer entered the post office to stop Reich broadcasts.

Western war correspondents regularly appeared to talk to the Dönitz government. It gave ministers a sense of importance, but the Allies ignored the government, and it was given no diplomatic recognition.

Monday, 14th May, 1945

The victorious Allied flag was raised on to the police station's roof during an official ceremony. Dönitz decided to remove all images of Hitler and other Nazis from the offices that the British occupying forces were moved into.

Tuesday, 22nd May, 1945

A British patrol stopped a group of shabby German soldiers marching on foot west of Hamburg. The Germans claimed to be returning home from the war. One of them introduced himself as Sergeant Heinrich Hitzinger.

Hitzinger seemed frail and wore a patch over his left eye. The Germans were placed in a prison camp, but Hitzinger was highly dissatisfied with his treatment at the hands of the British, and demanded to speak with the camp commandant. Suddenly, he removed the eyepatch to reveal his true identity: Heinrich Himmler, former interior minister and head of the SS. Himmler described himself as one of the country's top leaders and sincerely thought he was deserving of more respect. The camp commander promptly dispatched Himmler to the British headquarters in Lüneburg.

Wednesday, 23rd May, 1945

Himmler arrived in Lüneburg. His captors wanted to be absolutely sure he had no poison on his person, so started to perform a full body search. Previously cooperative, Himmler refused to open his mouth when asked, biting into a cyanide pill he'd hidden there. A battle to save him ensued, but after 15 minutes he was declared dead. His body would be later buried secretly in the forests of Lüneburg Heath.

The same day, the British occupying power decided to dissolve the Dönitz government in Flensburg. Soldiers entered the naval academy and gathered together the German ministers, staff officers and other administrative personnel – around 300 people in all.

"Hands up!" and "Trousers down!" came the cry, and the British conducted comprehensive body searches for poison capsules. The German chief negotiator von Friedeburg felt so humiliated that he committed suicide. Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, along with Albert Speer, were taken prisoner. Ahead lay the trials for war crimes in Nuremberg.

PERSPECTIVE

Nazis received harsh fate

Several Nazi leaders believed that they would be important to the Allies after the peace. But none of them came to play any role in the post-war period.

HERMANN GÖRING was expelled from the party by Hitler's Political Testament. He fled to Austria, where he was arrested by American soldiers. Göring committed suicide later in prison.

HEINRICH HIMMLER tried to escape disguised as an ordinary German soldier. When he landed in a prison camp, he chose to reveal his identity, but subsequently committed suicide.

KARL DÖNITZ was arrested by the Allies on 23rd May. Dönitz was sentenced to 10 years in prison in Nuremberg, which he never accepted when he only considered himself to be a soldier.

ALBERT SPEER also sat in the dock at Nuremberg, where he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. After his release in 1966 he wrote about the Nazi era and gave a number of interviews.

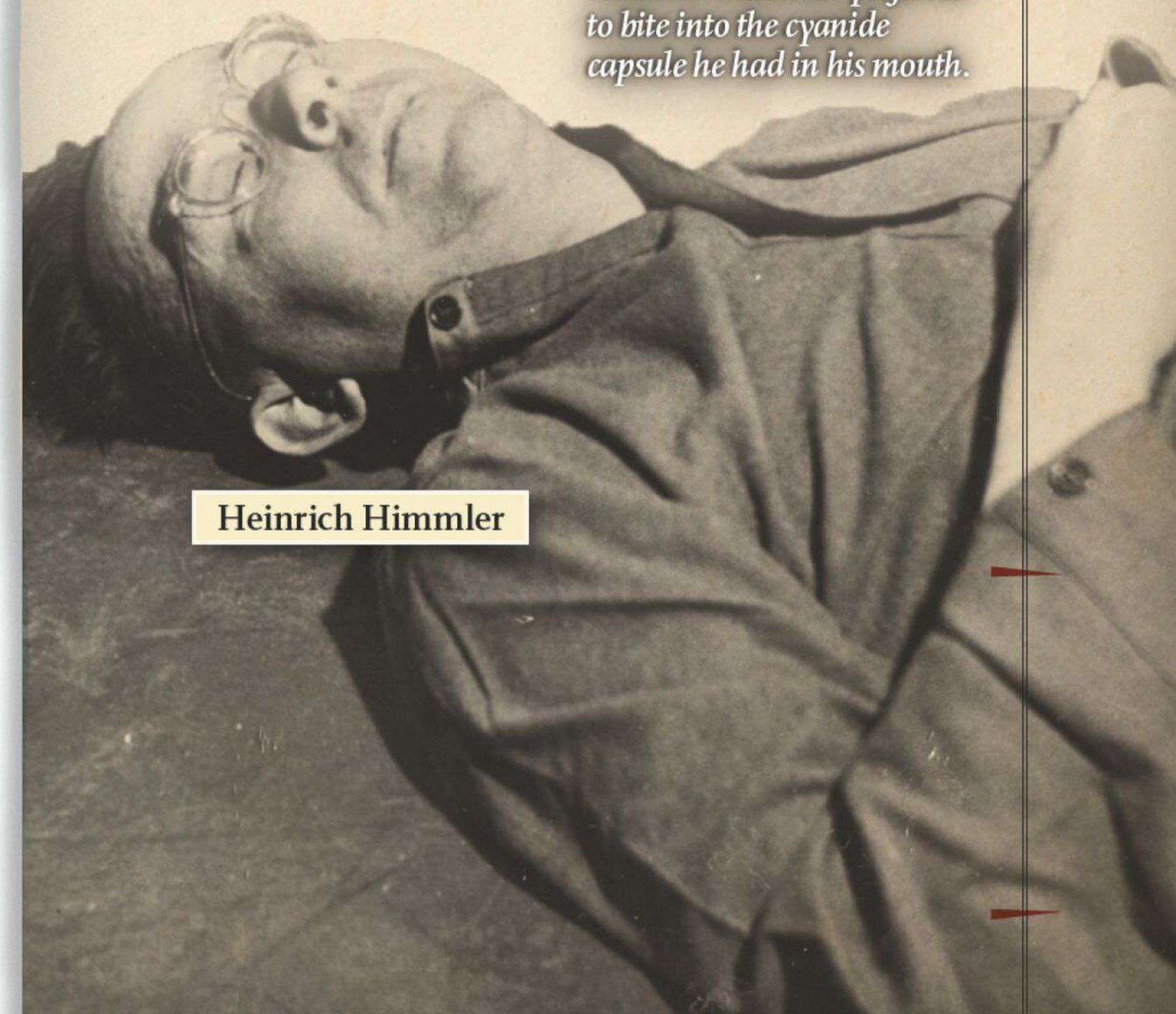
WILHELM KEITEL received a death sentence at the Nuremberg Trials for his share of war crimes and was hanged in 1946.

ALFRED JODL was also sentenced to death in Nuremberg. Jodl wanted to be shot according to military tradition, but the court refused and he was hanged on 16th October, 1946.

SCHWERIN VON KROSIGK went through a long trial before he was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 1949. The former finance minister, however, was released as part of an amnesty in 1951.

HANS-GEORG VON FRIEDEBURG had already in 1944 decided to take his own life if he was arrested. On May 23rd, 1945, he made good on his promise.

Heinrich Himmler preferred to bite into the cyanide capsule he had in his mouth.



Heinrich Himmler

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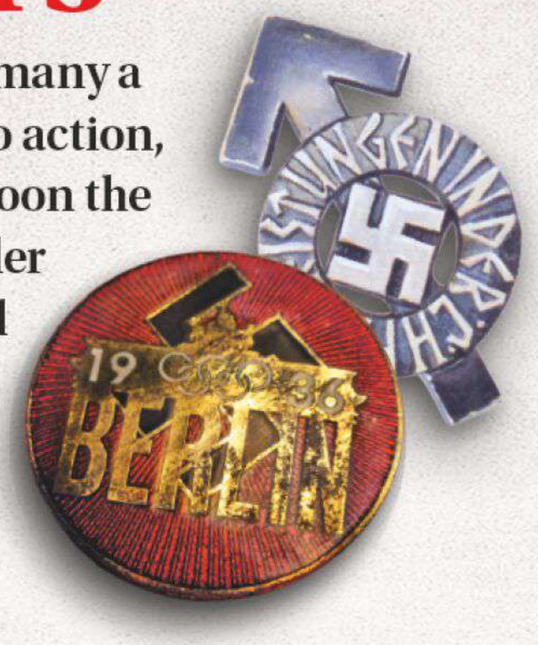
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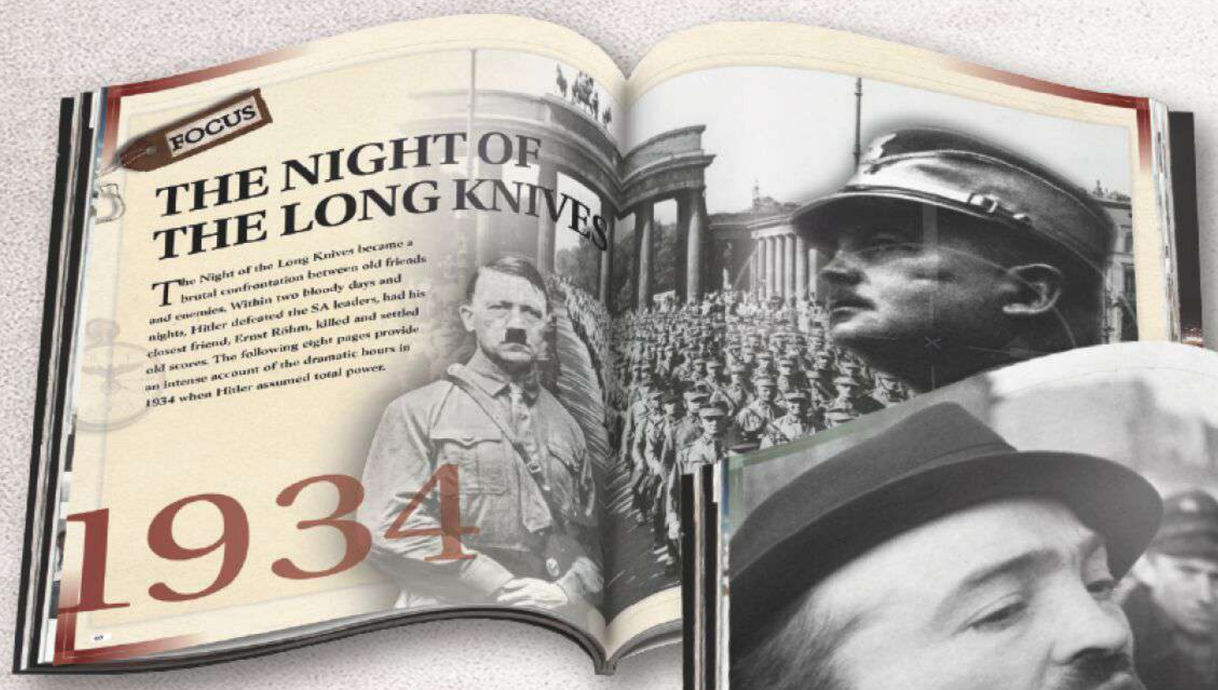
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When Adolf Hitler seized power in 1933, he promised Germany a 1,000-year Reich. In 1939, the Nazi war machine roared into action, but the Führer's dreams were shattered outside Moscow. Soon the German armies were in full retreat and by Spring 1945 Hitler realised the war was lost, committing suicide. In this special issue, follow the drama of the rise and fall of the Third Reich.













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